

IN THE AFTERMATH

This Diocesan Church of Altoona-Johnstown gathered in prayer a week ago at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. We gathered to pray for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, as well as for those who have left our communities to help in the aftermath and the families that they left behind. At the same time, we recalled the fourth anniversary of the attack on the United States, especially the heroes of United Flight 93, who have become entombed in the soil of our land.

The priests, deacons, and laity, who laid aside whatever they would have otherwise been doing and came to pray, have my gratitude. I am encouraged by their understanding that gathering and praying as the one Diocesan Church is an important act. We came together in response to the Lord, Who just may be trying to get our attention. Even as I write, Hurricane Ophelia looms over the horizon and Mount Saint Helen threatens to spew out its deadly ash once again.

Events such as these are not ours to control, to prevent, or even to understand. The fact of the matter is that we are not God, a fact that appears to elude us so easily. It is the aftermath that is ours, including that of Hurricane Katrina. What we do with it is what is going to count with the Lord. That response can take several forms.

First, our response must be one of gratitude. We in this portion of the Lord's vineyard have been spared, --- weather-wise and otherwise. I think of what might have been if United Flight 93 had fallen onto Johnstown or any other community within our Diocesan Church over which the plane flew on its way to Washington, D.C.

Second, our response must be one of petition to the Lord for those who suffer, who have been displaced, and who have been exiled from their homes, - especially those who have lost loved ones.

Third, our response must be one of sharing our resources, as well as ourselves to the extent that we are able to do so. We need to be generous with the finances that ultimately belong to the Lord.

Fourth, our response must be one of reformation in terms of the values and priorities that guide the way that we live. These days are reminders that the flimsy foundations on which we base our lives can be gone overnight. And, when that happens, all we have left is ourselves, our God, and those who choose to help us in his name.

"We give thanks to God whose power is revealed in nature, and whose providence is revealed in history." Those obligated to pray the Divine Office have this as one of the intercessions for Sunday Evening of the Third Week.

Indeed, nature reveals God's power. May history, now, show his providence, of which the Lord has asked you and me to be an integral part. We are very much a part of his story.