

## **“GO, REBUILD MY CHURCH” WHY FATIMA MATTERS TO 4000 STRONG**

While the words “Go, rebuild my Church” are associated with St. Francis of Assisi, they remain an apt descriptor for **Church renewal in every age**. The Reformers’ cry was that the Church is always in need of reform, and in many respects this adage is perennially valid. The Church is not static, nor ought it to be. However, “reform” can be a loaded term, and important distinctions need to be made. In the next few weeks, I’d like to share some thoughts about reform as we approach the **500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses**. I hope to do so as objectively as possible, citing points of convergence, while acknowledging areas of divergence. But first, I’d like to reflect on the incredible day I was privileged to witness last Friday, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the final apparition at Fatima, for it too signals reform.

At the outset, I note that a priest classmate of mine predicted that the Church would be filled for the 5:15 p.m. Mass last Friday. I confess that I did not believe this would be the case, even though I expected a decent turnout. I had even arranged for two priests to assist me with confessions, and then added even a third priest who had volunteered when I saw him at the Clergy Study Day on Wednesday. I heard confessions steadily, yet detected no audible “din” from within the Church that would indicate a large turnout. Only when I emerged from the confessional a little after 5:00 p.m. did I realize just how incredibly wrong I was. I discovered that **nine priests** were hearing confessions— we only have six confessionals! They spontaneously “set up shop” in the side chapels with chairs. The church was filled, and yet it remained remarkably quiet.

I was completely stunned. When I proceeded to the sacristy, it was teeming with priests and seminarians and I realized that we had run out of vestments for the visiting priests. We had set out twenty, thinking it would surely be enough— it was not! When it came time for the distribution of Holy Communion, I grew nervous, as I saw the faithful continuing to file up the center aisle behind the cross aisle, seemingly **appearing out of nowhere**. We had miscalculated the numbers because from the sanctuary we could not see the faithful standing in the side chapels or the Narthex in back. We ended up breaking up hosts, not just in half but in ¼ fragments— barely large enough to handle, so as to provide Communion to those who, due to traffic and parking issues, arrived after Mass had begun.

But it gets better! When the Procession assembled 30 minutes after Mass, the crowd grew even larger. I estimate that **at least 4000 people** attended the **Candlelight Rosary Procession**, people of all ages and ethnicities, hailing from many different parishes. A parishioner sent me a video he took and as the camera pans the candlelight crowd, it is simply stunning. I had been inside making preparations, as there was little time between the Mass and the procession, so I am afraid I missed the view. Only after the fact did I learn that literally hundreds of people never made it inside of the Church during the procession, as there was not even standing room. What is the take away here? Did last Friday signal something much deeper?

My considerable underestimation of the number of faithful who would be moved to participate in the anniversary has forced me to reflect. Have the problems in this Archdiocese in recent years had a cumulative effect upon me, subtly and unwittingly leading to me calling into question the resilience of the faithful? If so, Friday was a call to greater trust. The Archbishop truly lifted our spirits, when looking out at the throng, he exclaimed— “Isn’t it great to be Catholic?” His words were met with resounding applause. It was just what the doctor ordered. Without denying the serious issues that we face as a local church due to grievous sins and failures of those who are called to ministerial service, might this Mass and Procession serve as a real turning point in this local Church?

The **message of Fatima** is both timely and timeless, one of personal conversion. We simply cannot speak about reform without first speaking about individual conversion. Last Friday afternoon, I had arranged to provide some sandwiches to the families of our dedicated altar servers, so that they could all grab a quick bite to eat between the Mass and the procession. When I picked up the sandwiches, I was met with a curious response from the manager of the sandwich shop. He started talking about the bankruptcy (without prompt, I assure you!), opining— “Perhaps it is time for the Church to update its rules.” I did not take the bait. Clearly, he was referring to celibacy, which of course is a separate issue from clerical sexual abuse. He noted that the bible

teaches the goodness of marriage, to which I wholeheartedly agreed, clarifying that clerical celibacy in no way denigrates marriage. I replied that Scripture also speaks of those who remain single “for the sake of the kingdom,” and that the two states of life were not opposed. This is the type of conversation that many priests have had all too often in recent times. I get it, but it is still frustrating.

Perhaps last Friday represented this local Church’s resilience and willingness to witness– “We are here and ready to get back to the Catholic life we love!” Despite all the turmoil of this “valley of tears,” I believe it signaled that nonetheless we are going to continue moving forward. Collectively, fixing our eyes upon Jesus, we are **rebuilding His Church**. The timeless message of Fatima requires an inner conversion as well as a prayer for the conversion of the world. Let us remain committed to Our Lady’s message and rejoice—that is right—**rejoice**, in the thousands who witnessed to the way in which God miraculously enters into our world. We felt His love and presence and the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Fatima. (Next Week: Martin Luther’s Piety)

- Time for **Solomon** to intervene? The disagreement between the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Peoria over the final resting place for **Venerable Fulton J. Sheen** is most unfortunate. It has gone to the appellate court. New York claims that it was Sheen’s express wish to be buried in the crypt at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, while the relatives of the beloved Catholic evangelist maintain their desire for his remains to return to his native Peoria, IL! What happens if the appellate judgement turns out to be a **split decision**?
- I have never visited Spain, but hope to do so someday soon. I am watching the news following the secession decision of Catalonia and the serious implications it holds for both for the Church and society. Obviously, our nation is not the only one suffering from polarization amongst its people.
- This coming Wednesday, October 25 at 7:30 p.m. the Cathedral of Saint Paul is pleased to present the 70-voice German youth choir, **Jugendkonzertchor Dortmund** in concert. This top ensemble of talented youth (14-19 years of age) will sing a wide range of music.
- Join us this Saturday October 28 at 9:00 a.m. for our next Volunteer Day, as we continue to prepare a home for the **Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus**. Young and old alike are invited to enter the convent from the Dayton Ave. (north side) entrance. Don’t worry—all skill levels are welcome.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector