

Return To Normal: St. Mary's Catholic Church Easter Week Emotional After Long Battle With COVID-19 Pandemic

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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(Carolyn Simansky and Jeff Vaughn contributed photos to this story).

ALTON - There were a lot of tears shed and hope for the future at this past week's Easter festivities at St. Mary's Catholic Church. Parishioners were so thankful to be back to normal with church activities, Father Paul Nguyen, OMV, said.

St. Mary's Catholic Church festivities started Thursday night with the Mass of the Lord's Supper and it was well attended. There were 12 men who represented the disciples of Christ in the service as it played out.

On Good Friday, the service was "just packed," Carolyn Simansky, a long-time devoted church member, said. "It was impressive how many venerated the cross at the Mass," she explained. "It is touching to see people either bow, kiss, or touch the cross in such reverence."

There were three Baptisms at the Easter Vigil Mass with ages ranging from 20 to 70 years. On Sunday, there were five Masses and each was well-attended, said Simansky.

Simansky said it is not uncommon for one person in a marriage who is Catholic to work to bring their spouse into the church. "These Baptisms also mean so much to be a part of," Simansky added. She is one of the leaders of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) in the church.

Deacon Jim Schwartzkopf said during the Easter Vigil homily he was amazed how many came forward and kissed the cross with reverence. He reflected on the 2020 Easter where there were no live services and last year still coming back into its full attendance.

"This year it was beautiful to watch how people showed reverence to the crucifix and many people had tears with what we had gone through with the coronavirus," the deacon said.

Father Paul on Saturday morning agreed with what Deacon Jim was saying and said everything this Easter weekend had been just beautiful. He was so happy to see everyone back and church attendance has been going up and up over the last few years. People are now strongly coming back to services.

Last year, parishioners had to sit a row apart, but this year with the COVID-19 Pandemic diminishing everything was more or less back to normal, which was wonderful said Father Nguyen and Simansky.

"Father Paul and all the priests looked joyful all weekend in the services," Simansky said. "Every year the Saturday Easter Vigil is the highest Mass of the year. We bless new Holy Water, an Easter candle and we have new members join us. It was a wonderful week of events."

"It was a very sacred experience," Father Paul said. "It was very clear by the prayerfulness of those who attended that we were there to contemplate the deepest part of our faith and bring everything we have been through in that prayer."

At the end of the Easter Vigil Mass, Father Paul issued a call to all the faithful telling them to "put out into the deep."

"All of these new Catholics that we see here before us were somehow inspired or brought here by other followers of Christ," Father Paul said. "Don't be afraid to invite anyone to consider becoming Catholic, to consider making this journey with us toward Heaven."

He encouraged people to invite their friends, family, and neighbors to consider following this way to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

