

# 125th Anniversary St. Luke Parish - Sparrows Point

## **I. Introduction**

It is a great joy to visit St. Luke Parish and to celebrate with you its 125th anniversary! So let me begin by wishing you a happy anniversary and by asking God's abundant blessings upon you and your families. Let me add that, while this is my first visit to St. Luke's, it will not be my last. May this be a day of joy and grace for us all!

## **II. Supplications, Prayers, Petitions, and Thanksgivings**

Today's second reading was taken from the 1st Letter of St. Paul to Timothy, an epistle that gives us a glimpse of the Church's life at a very early stage. On this day of celebration, I would submit that, in so many ways, St. Luke Parish is living illustration of all that St. Paul wrote about in today's second reading.

First, he says, "I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity." First and foremost, St. Luke's is a community of prayer. Whether you gathered in the beloved old church on D Street at Sparrows Point or, as has been the case for many years, in this present location, you are the church at prayer. We think today of the many Baptisms, First Holy Communions, and Marriages as well as the many Confirmations, moments of sacramental prayer that brought together your families, your loved ones, and this family of faith - St. Luke Parish. We think of the many times this parish prayed for those who were injured at the Bethlehem Steel plant or the funerals of those who died in industrial accidents. The prayers offered in the parish church are mirrored by the prayers offered in your homes - perhaps an evening Rosary or favorite devotions. Today St. Luke's remains a place of vibrant prayer, including weekday Mass, first Friday devotions, Scripture study and so much more.

Prayer is at the heart of the Church's mission. Prayer is what binds us together as a parish community and gives us the wisdom and courage to face life's many uncertainties, including those that come with retirement and advancing years.

Prayer is what takes us beyond our problems and concerns and prompts us to pray with and for other the wider church and for those who have left the Church and those who are still searching.

### **III. God Wants Everyone to Be Saved**

St. Paul then tells us that God is pleased with our prayers – for the Lord wills that everyone “be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” Why is it that a parish is founded? What is in the hearts of those, priests and people, who sacrifice so much to build a church, a school, and sustain all its programs of service? Is it not the sense that we are doing God’s work? That we are not just meeting the needs of parishioners but also inviting everyone to encounter Christ, to experience God’s love? To hear the Gospel, to be part of the Church, to live as disciples?

When your parish was founded in 1888 as the first parish in this greater Dundalk / North Point Peninsula area, there were only a handful of parishioners. In fact, the first pastor, Fr. Thomas Leonard, lived at St. Patrick’s in Fells Point and travelled by boat ‘all the way to Dundalk’ – to offer Mass until a church could be built, the cornerstone of which was laid by Bishop-elect John S. Foley of Detroit.

Over time, as Bethlehem steel grew and employed more people, the number of parishioners increased, so much so, that it gave rise to new parishes, St. Rita in 1922, St. Mildred and St. Adrian in 1944, both of which were combined as Our Lady of Hope in 1967. Amid all this growth and development, there was an underlying desire to invite everyone in this area to experience God’s saving love and to bring them to a knowledge of the truth. Generation after generation, this saving, transforming truth has been proclaimed: “ ... there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all ... ”

Thus to this day there is a very active R.C.I.A. program, a Catholic School shared with Our Lady of Hope, a religious education program that is growing rapidly, and many opportunities for faith-sharing and growing in knowledge of the truth! This is a parish that seeks to hear the Gospel, to see with the light of faith, and then to welcome all those who know deep down that the Lord is calling them.

### **IV. Teachers in Faith and Truth**

St. Paul also wrote that he was appointed preacher and apostle ... one who is sent to proclaim and teach the Gospel, a teacher "in faith and truth". Perhaps this 125th anniversary is a good day to recall the towering figure of Cardinal James Gibbons who established this wonderful parish in 1888. It would a day to remember my predecessors who visited here, but in a special way Bishop T. Austin Murphy, the great uncle of your pastor who, by the way, ordained me a deacon.

Mention has already been made of Fr. Thomas Leonard, the founding pastor, but we should also remember in our prayers Father John Gaynor, who served as pastor for 30 year, beginning in 1903. Under his leadership, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and diocesan seminarians came to this parish to offer instructions in the faith. Or Father John Albert under who, in the late 1950's, convinced Bethlehem Steel to donate the property on which the school was built and convinced the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill to staff it.

We remember with gratitude Fr. E. Melville Taylor who built the school at the direction of Archbishop Keough.

With us today, however, are priests who, more recently, have served this parish community. I also want to join you in greeting and welcoming home those priests who have served this community of faith so long as so well, beginning with your two recent pastors - Fr. Mark Logue and Msgr. Joseph Lizer. With us today also is Fr. Kevin Farmer and Fr. David Carey, and Msgr. Robert Hartnett who was ordained a deacon in this parish. To all of you, dear brothers, our warmest and deepest thanks!

And I would like to take this opportunity to join with you in expressing thanks to Fr. Greg Rapisarda who serves as a roving associate pastor and hospital chaplain and, in a very special way, to your current pastor, Father T. Austin Murphy. Thank you, Fr. Murphy, for your loving and energetic service to this great community of faith! And thanks to all of you - lay leaders, catechists, school teachers, pastoral visitors, parents and grandparents, and so many others - in handing on the faith, in making this parish a place of prayer, in exemplifying the virtues that are part of being a follower of Christ and a member of his Body, the Church, and in serving the needs of the sick, the homebound, and those in need, especially through the wonderful parish food pantry.

## **V. A Living Legacy**

If he were to return, St. Paul would see you as a reflection of his ministry. With the great Apostle and teacher of the nations, I pray that for many years to come you will be a vibrant community of faith, worship and serving through the intercession of St. Luke and the Blessed Virgin Mary. May God bless you and keep you always in His love!