

## **SCREEN: Finale!**

**ME:** Any Game of Thrones fans out there? (raise hand)

Or how about fans of the Avengers?

The last movie in the franchise, Avengers: Endgame, is now in theatres.

Or fans of the TV show 'The Big Bang Theory', which also just had its finale?

If you're a fan of any of these, I'd be curious to know what you thought of the ending, because I've read there have been mixed reactions.

Some fans were upset that a favorite character died.

Or the one they hoped would find true love didn't.

Or they never saw it ending 'that way'.

For true fans, endings are always hard to take.

But the good news is, that in Hollywood, endings are usually just transitions.

The Big Bang Theory has a prequel, there will be Game of Thrones spin-offs, and I can guarantee we haven't seen the last of the Avengers!

**WE:** But you know, it's not just TV or movies where endings are hard; it's also true in life.

I'm thinking of graduations or moving to a new town, or leaving for a new job.

These are bittersweet moments with laughter and tears.

One chapter of life is ending, but an exciting new one is beginning.

As disciples, God wants us to see these moments as opportunities for change and growth.

**SCREEN: This Is Us main screen**

This is week two of our message series titled, This Is Us.

It's our finale to the Easter season.

Today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord,  
a really bittersweet moment for Jesus's followers.

As sad as it was, it was exciting because God was using this moment to  
create something new for the Church.

**SCREEN: blank red background**

**GOD:** In our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles  
we heard that forty days after Jesus rose from the dead he  
summoned the Apostles to a mountaintop in Galilee for the grand finale.  
After some final instructions,  
he ascended into the heavens.

I can almost imagine their reaction.

*So wait, it's up to us now to go make disciples,*

*This is how it ends? We want a do over!*

The next chapter - an exciting chapter - was about to begin and  
the Apostles wondered if they were ready.

But they were.

In the Gospel reading today, here's what Jesus said to them:

**SCREEN: "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer**

**and rise from the dead on the third day**

**and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins,**

**would be preached in his name**

**to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.**

**You are witnesses of these things.**

**And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you;**

**but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."**

**-Luke 24: 46-49**

He's telling them (and us):

*God is in control, and what comes next is going to be amazing!*

*Just stay close to me and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.*

**YOU:** Just like with the Apostles God is calling you to trust,  
to believe that he is with you and has an exciting plan for you life.  
The Holy Spirit wants to lead you...all of us...to someplace new.

**SCREEN: This Is Us main screen**

On the screen is the graphic for this series.

It's made up of photos of members of our parish.

It shows how vibrant and diverse our parish family has become.

It shows people who have been here since our parish was founded,  
and people who have joined because of all we're doing.

This is us; this is who we are as a parish.

A parish with hope and a positive vision.

A vision I know is from God and is being directed by the Holy Spirit.

I am so amazed by the stories of life-change I hear  
every week from our members.

At this time, I'm going to ask Katie Skerpon and Jen Buter,  
two members of our staff to share one of these stories with you.

**KATIE & JEN SHARE**

**KATIE**

Thank you Father Mike.

Today we're excited to share with you the story of two kids who have grown up  
having a personal relationship with Jesus because of what we do as a parish.

**SCREEN: entranceway picture of the Family**

These are the Seaman's – mom Susan and her son Christian and daughter Meskerem.

Long time members of St Pius, The Seaman's are a unique family who truly represent the diversity and beauty that is SPX.

Susan has been a small group leader in KidMin and credits our new Friday Night Praise with helping to deepen her faith through music. She has a strong commitment to raising her children to walk with Jesus, and from all evidence she's succeeding with the help of this parish.

**JEN**

**SCREEN: Meskerum**

Meskerem bounces into KidMin each week ready to learn and grow. Her energy brings life to her small group and her small group leader shares how much her participation encourages others to engage as well. Meskerem can always be found in KidMin Sunday mornings.... Sneaking up to hear the message through the big window because according to her, the view is good up there!

**SCREEN: Christian**

Big Brother Christian holds the honor of being our youngest ever usher. Too small to hold our doors open, he handed out bulletins and then positioned himself by the handicapped door to push the button for those needing assistance.

At a time in my life when I wasn't really sold on this whole church thing, seeing Christian's faith and service was one of the motivating factors for me to get here each week. Watching him grow up in the church and feel that it was HIS parish, taking such ownership at such a young age, has truly been an inspiration for my own faith journey.

Christian credits his small group leaders in KidMin and MSM with having the “biggest impact” on him. He shares that his KidMin small group leader helped him learn “everything we needed to know to become closer to God and how to grow deeper in our faith.” And that is our goal in KidMin – not just that they know a list of facts, but that they come to know the person of Jesus and develop a relationship with Him.

His middle school small group leaders, Rich Kelly and Jim Pierson- who you heard about last week – have been a huge influence in his life. They help take each week’s message deeper, by guiding the students, like Christian, to see how it impacts their lives.

Christian shared that “Being at this church has helped me greatly in growing deeper in my faith through all of the different ministries that St. Pius has to offer. This church has done so much for me and has helped me get to closer God.”

### **SCREEN: Family at the Easter Photo Booth**

**KATIE**

Imagine if each middle school boy in this parish could make that statement. That’s our vision, to engage each and every kid, student, and adult in programs and ministries that meet them where they are and challenge them to take their step towards Jesus.

It takes resources to purchase curriculum that is age appropriate, exciting and engaging. It takes resources to train our small group leaders in KidMin, MSM and

adult groups so that they can facilitate discussion that leads to life change. It takes time to build relationships with parishioners to find the next Rich Kelly or Jim Pierson or Susan Seaman, who will make a difference in the lives of our children.

JEN

This is what your giving does. On behalf of all the Christians and Meskerums out there – thank you for your financial support.

SCREEN: BLANK RED

*After:* Thank you Katie and Jen!

Next week is Pentecost, the birthday of the Church,  
and we will again hear a story about our parishioners.

Yes, we've seen successes and have achieved much.

Our next chapter has begun and I need each of you to be part of it.

The past few years we've asked you to renew your commitment  
to the parish on Pentecost.

Commitment can take many forms and throughout the year  
we talk about ways you can step up and serve.

In this series I am focusing on your commitment to financial support.

Let me talk about why your financial support is so essential.

When you commit to financially support St. Pius,  
lives are changed...you heard it last week and heard it again today.

When you commit, you make possible everything we do as a parish;  
all our ministries and programs for kids, students and adults  
as well as staffing and facilities.

What's our vision going forward?

What does our future look like?

Let me share some possibilities.

SLAM, which is our children's worship, is bursting at some Masses.

We need the resources to divide SLAM into sections by age groups.

Our childcare provides a space for toddlers to go during Mass.

We want to see childcare incorporate worship and bible stories so that even our littlest ones can get to know Jesus.

Our KidMin, which we used to call CCD, is maxed out in the Faith Center.

We need to redesign the spaces we use to provide the best opportunity for kids to grow in faith.

We have to do these things because we are committed to serving kids and students: THIS IS US!

For our adults, we want to continue to expand our small groups program.

Doing that entails training and support for small group leaders.

When it comes to weekend worship, we need to keep exploring ways to make it the best it can be to reach those who are being drawn to St. Pius.

We are committed to adults and making the weekend matter: THIS IS US!

We know that life-change comes through relationship.

It takes time and resources to spend time one-on-one with parishioners and those seeking us out.

And need to keep reaching out to all the de-churched Catholics in our area; all the Bowie Bobs and Bowie Barbs.

We are committed to being outward-facing: THIS IS US!

What I've just described is a vision of a growing church with a bright future.

To make it a reality requires staff and resources.

See we have what we need to maintain what we are currently offering.

But as you heard me say last week, any church that is simply maintaining is a church on life support; it can't survive for long.

This week every registered household received a letter from me asking for your financial support.

Giving to your church is one essential way you live out your personal call of discipleship.

And when every member commits to giving,

then our parish can live out it's calling to '*go make disciples*'.

Giving can take different forms, but giving for disciples, is not an option.

One of the best ways we've found for you to support the parish on a regular, ongoing basis is through Faith Direct.

At present, 1 in 5 of our households use Faith Direct.

It is how I make my contribution to the parish.

Why is online giving preferred?

As I wrote in my letter to you, the parish is better able to plan and budget when we have dedicated giving every month.

And we know that when people give automatically, support to the parish grows so we can keep growing.

I don't know about you, but most of my regular 'bills' are now online and paid automatically each month.

I know exactly what's happening with my finances.

And your giving through Faith Direct can make that a reality for the parish.

So today there are computers in the entranceway for you to enroll in Faith Direct.



There will be staff to assist you and answer your questions.

We will have computers next weekend too.

Signing up is a quick and easy process.

And if you're like me and already use Faith Direct and want to increase your giving, you can do that today too.

I will be increasing my giving as I do each year.

If you prefer to use your offertory envelopes,  
we have a table in the center of the entranceway.

If you are committing to increase your giving in the coming year,  
I'd ask you to stop at the center table and leave your name and address.

This isn't binding, it's not a contract, but it will help us get a picture  
of our finances going forward.

God has given a unique vision and call to our parish.

A place where everyone is welcome because everyone matters.

I want us to be a church that people who don't like Church, like.

A church that eases the burdens of those who are struggling or seeking.

And I think that's the church you want too.

Let's pray that we live up to our calling as a parish.

**SCREEN: Friday Night Praise June 7th announcement screen**

I also asking you to join us this week for Friday Night Praise  
as we begin our celebration of Pentecost.

We will praying for the Holy Spirit to renew our Church in the coming year.

I know it is going to be a powerful evening of prayer and praise.

**WE:** There are bright days ahead for our parish.

I am confident in Christ's vision for his Church.

If you believe as I do that *THIS IS US*, let us together say 'amen'.

AMEN! +