

**SCREEN: Archbishop Wilton Gregory photo**

**ME:** On Tuesday I attended the installation of our new archbishop:  
Wilton Gregory.

The Mass was a true celebration with so much joy and hope.

After the Mass ended I overheard one person say,

*"I think we've turned a corner!"*

We've turned a corner.

I'm pretty sure I know what she was referring to.

In his homily, Archbishop Gregory said this:

*We have been tossed about by an unusually turbulent moment  
in our own faith journeys recently and for far too long.*

*Waves of unsettling revelations have caused even the heartiest among us  
to grow fearful and perhaps even, at times, to want to panic.*

*But....he continued....God is here.*

**SCREEN: He is here when the seas are calm,  
and He is here during every moment of uncertainty, anger, fear, and shame.  
He invites us to place our trust in Him...and Him alone.  
He will calm and steady His Church. -Wilton Gregory**

Our Archbishop is acknowledging what we've all experienced the past year.  
Uncertainty, anger, fear and shame.

We may have 'turned a corner' but the clergy abuse crisis is not over.

For the victims and their families, it will never be over.

All across America church attendance has dropped.

We've experienced it here.

In the face of this crisis, each Catholic has a choice to make:

*do I stay or do I go?*

*Do I stay or do I go?*

*If I go, what does that mean?*

*And if I stay, what does it require?*

**SCREEN: This Is Us main screen**

Today we're beginning a new message series titled, This Is Us.

For three weeks I'll be talking honestly and directly about who we are as a Church and as a parish.

I will also share with you signs of hope.

Because I know, as challenging as these times are, we will get through this.

And the readings today point the way.

**SCREEN: blank red background**

**GOD:** Our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles gave us our first hopeful signpost.

When you hear about everything the early church faced, it's survival is nothing short of miraculous.

Because against all odds, the movement Jesus started succeeded.

The Romans and religious authorities tried to kill it but they failed.

Not only did they fail, they helped the church grow.

In fact, the number of disciples grew so fast the Apostles scrambled to keep up.

See, at first all the Christians lived in Jerusalem and were Jewish.

Then St. Paul came along and started preaching to the Gentiles.

So the question the Apostles struggled with was this:

*should the Gentile Christians be required to follow all of our Jewish laws?*

Now, since you and I and virtually every Christian alive today are considered Gentile converts, it's hard to appreciate what a huge deal this was back then.

The Apostles knew that the church was at a crossroads.

They had to figure out what to do if it was going to survive.

And they did.

They met, they prayed, they discussed,

I'm sure there was a heated argument....

but then they arrived at a decision.

The greatest decision they would ever make.

And one that ensured that the church continued to grow by leaps and bounds.

Here's what they wrote to all the Gentile converts:

**SCREEN: It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us**

not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities,  
namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols,  
from blood, from meats of strangled animals,  
and from unlawful marriage.

If you keep free of these,  
you will be doing what is right. -Acts 15: 28-29

The Holy Spirit was leading them someplace new,  
calling them to open the ways of salvation to people  
they once considered unworthy.

And because they embraced Christ's vision for his Church,  
the Gospel of Jesus spread to the ends of the earth.

I was especially taken by the one line the Apostles wrote:

*"To not place on you any burden beyond these..."*

That tells me they chose to focus on the essentials.

They decided, *"we want to avoid creating obstacles  
that keep others from Christ."*

This is a message for today's Church too.

But how do we know what is essential and what God wants?

The night before he died, Jesus gave the answer to his Apostles.

Here's what he said:

**SCREEN:** the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,  
will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.

The same Holy Spirit that Jesus sent upon the Apostles at Pentecost  
has been given to us.

With the Holy Spirit we can face any crisis, navigate change and  
make sure the Church keeps growing.

**YOU:** The problems in our Church today are deeply troubling.

We will overcome them by remembering that God is always with us  
to lead us through turbulent times.

So I'm not afraid and neither should you be.

But I think it's fair to say that with all that's gone on in the past twelve months,

you've been given lots of reasons to leave.

I want to give you some reasons to stay.

### **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.

We're not perfect by any stretch.

No parish is.

We're still trying to figure out what to do and how to do it.

The good news for us at St. Pius is that just like with the early church, we are growing.

Not just with membership---we're not just growing wider---  
we're also growing deeper...deeper in faith.

And 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 a member of our staff  
to share some of these stories with you.

### **KATIE SHARES**

*After:* Thank you Katie!

Next week and again on a Pentecost, we'll hear more stories of parishioners.

Yes, we've seen successes and have achieved much,  
but I know God is not done with us and that's exciting.

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 today.

Next week I will talk about the ways that our members' giving  
is the lifeblood of our parish.

I'll also talk about our vision going forward.

For now I want to say that our goal as a parish is not to just 'maintain'  
those things we currently have or our currently doing.

Maintaining is not an option.

A church stuck in maintenance mode is a church on life-support; it can't survive.

To remain healthy and keep growing we must boldly and courageously share  
the message of Jesus in new and creative ways.

Jesus commands us to grow and bear fruit.

He's telling us we must be mission-oriented.

Mission-oriented.

Another term for mission-oriented is being outward-facing.

It means reaching out beyond the walls of our church to the unchurched  
and the de-churched; all the Bowie Bobs and Bowie Barbs out there.

Our parish vision only becomes reality when every member of St. Pius is committed.

Because staying in the Church means being an active contributor of our future.

This coming week I'll be communicating with you directly  
about how you can support us financially or deepen your support.

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**

And speaking of prayer, in two weeks we will gather for Friday Night Praise  
to begin our celebration of Pentecost, which is the birthday of the Church.

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

This will be our last Friday Night Praise until September.

Please join us for what promises to be a powerful evening of prayer and praise.

**WE:** When I see all the challenges facing our Church, I am not afraid.

I see great cause for hope.

I know there are brighter days ahead.

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

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

AMEN! +