

“UNDER THE SHADOW OF YOUR WINGS”: “SAFE SPACES” CHURCH STYLE

For reasons solely of proximity and most assuredly not due to my penchant for investigative prowess, I am the first call when the church alarm goes off. One summer evening, the alarm company called at 7:30 p.m. I surmised that perhaps a door pin had not engaged, permitting entry. Yet, while investigating I saw that **all doors** were properly secured. How strange. Seconds later, I heard some **rustling**, and it wasn't the wind! I froze. “I knew I shouldn't have entered alone,” was my first thought. It was followed quickly by, “I hope my breviary ribbons are placed properly and up to date,” lest when they find me they conclude I have not been saying my prayers—in case this all ends right here! (JK) But believe me, I was nervous. Psalm 17 came to mind: “Guard me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings.”

I shouted out, hoping to startle the individual into being intimidated, knowing full well my **bark is far worse** than my bite! As it turns out, a man had entered shortly before closing, started to pray and promptly fell asleep on a pew, only setting off the alarm 90 minutes later when he awoke and tripped the motion detector! He went there to pray for his gravely ill father. Relieved, I asked his name, only to recognize it— I had just **anointed his father** at 5:00 a.m. that morning, responding to an emergency call from the hospital. Talk about divine providence! This story had a peaceful ending, but I missed a few heartbeats! “Under his wings you will find refuge. His faithfulness is buckler and shield.” (Psalm 91)

Truthfully, we routinely encounter individuals who are carrying significant life burdens. They are often homeless or in transition, and fairly often there is the additional factor of mental illness. While not typically rising to the level of “criminal activity,” we have sadly had some of the latter as well. Ensuring a **safe environment** for all who enter these doors to offer praise and glory to God has been particularly high on my list in recent years. No, we are not a church only for the well-heeled and gainfully employed. We seek to be a **refuge** from the **raging storms of life**, including for our brothers and sisters who are struggling in life. When we have gotten to know particular individuals, we have offered some basic assistance as well as let them know that they are welcome in our church, provided they refrain from bringing in large backpacks or suitcases, etc. We do this in order to ensure the safety of others, and not needlessly raise suspicions.

It is easy to call to mind the surreal images from Paris of the fire that gutted the interior of Notre Dame Cathedral last April. By all accounts, it is miraculous that the structure withstood such a violent fire. Experts believe that had the fire raged an additional 10 minutes, it is quite likely the entire structure would have collapsed. Buried deep in some of these articles is the admission that the **alarm system** actually **worked**. The problem was not that the alarm failed; rather, myriad zones were mislabeled, making monitoring the system extremely cumbersome. It's one thing to recognize that an alarm has sounded. But pinpointing the exact location of the fire was elusive, causing a **needless delay**. Though the story has largely faded from American media, the long road to rebuilding this iconic medieval cathedral is underway. As you might expect, I immediately began to think about our own Cathedral, its safety and security needs.

We contract with a security company for **trained personnel** at each weekend Mass. You likely do not notice them, and that is precisely the point! But they are watching and remain alert— I for one am extremely grateful. We received a gift of approximately \$35,000 from an individual **outside** the parish, with the stipulations that (a) it be used for safety and security and (b) we endeavor to match the gift by means of a special collection. From today until Christmas, I invite Cathedral regulars and visitors to assist us. Potentially, we could see the first interior cameras installed sometime around the New Year. The goal is for **as complete visual coverage** as possible within the main body of the church and all the side chapels. Obviously this requires a **large number of cameras**, each strategically and discreetly placed. The presence of video surveillance provides a **strong deterrent** to those who may be tempted to pilfer the donations of the faithful at the ten votive candle stands, located either in the six Shrines of the Nations, or the four main side chapels.

We installed several basement cameras a few years ago and have referenced them when we suspected somebody had been here for nefarious reasons. How much more important to be able to keep an eye on our beautiful

treasure on the main level? Additionally, we are actively researching various possibilities for installing a **fire alarm system** within the **Cathedral dome** in the unlikely event of a fire. Obviously, delivering water in such a situation would be incredibly difficult. Still, an early warning sign could make the difference. I ask for your generosity today, or if not today, sometime before Christmas. Would you consider a more significant gift this month to our Safety and Security fund so that these goals may be met? The fund is dedicated to these purposes. Thank you for your prayerful consideration.

- Enemies of the faith...a fire broke out in a side chapel of Our Lady within the medieval gothic Cathedral of **Saint-Luperc d'Eauze** in France, 66 miles north of Lourdes. Authorities suspect Satanists. Don't be fooled, as these type of attacks against the Church are real—so too is the devil. It is horrific that there exist twisted individuals who serve Satan. The Prayer of St. Michael the Archangel is relevant and powerful— I urge you to pray it regularly.
- I had an interesting visit with a group of St. Paul Charter School students from **Upper Mississippi Academy**. I was impressed that they were studying a unit on world religions and wanted to interview a priest. Evangelization takes many forms, including very **intro level** concepts to young people who may or often may not have any formal religious upbringing.
- **Qantas Airlines** invited 52 company employees to test run a **19-hour, 19-minute flight** from London to Sydney. They were fine tuning their meal service, etc. to best manage an 11,000-mile flight with not one, but two sunrises! Just thinking about how my back would respond to being cooped up that long...I'd much rather break up the journey. When traveling to Nepal in 2016, we deliberately booked an 11-hour layover in London and walked all day seeing the sights with my niece, a grad student there at the time. I slept like a baby throughout the second overnight flight and felt great upon arrival.
- This year, **Thanksgiving Day** is the latest possible, November 28, the 4th Thursday of the month. I invite you to begin your holiday in prayer by joining us for **Mass at 9:00 a.m.** We offer to God our gratitude for our manifold blessings. Despite the many challenges in our nation, I cannot envision living anywhere else. Let us pray for our nation and honor our roots.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector