News



Father Nicholas G. DuPre (center), associate pastor at St. Mary Magdalen Parish in Abbeville, Louisiana, leads parishioners in prayer as a teenager attempted to enter the church with a rifle during a first Communion Mass May 11, 2024. (OSV News/St. Mary Magdalen live stream screenshot)

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Abbeville, Louisiana — May 13, 2024

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A first Communion Mass at St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church in Abbeville, Louisiana, was disrupted May 11 after a teenager attempted to enter the church with a rifle. Parishioners prevented the young man from entering the church where 60 children were preparing to receive their first Communion. Police took the suspect into custody and moments of chaos were caught on the church's live stream as they swept the premises to see if other threats were present.

The video shows an individual approaching Father Nicholas DuPre, associate pastor at St. Mary Magdalen, about 48 minutes into the service. After the man whispers a message into Father DuPre's ear, the priest asks parishioners to sit and leads them in praying Hail Marys. Police shortly thereafter entered the church and told parishioners they did "apprehend a young man," that "he is in custody" and to "calm down and just get next to your child and go slowly."

Abbeville Police Chief Mike Hardy told local news that the 16-year-old boy was taken to Abbeville General Hospital Behavioral Center for a medical evaluation after questioning. He has reportedly been charged with terrorizing and two counts of possession of a firearm by a juvenile.

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"We are thankful to God that a tragedy was avoided at the First Communion mass for the children of St. Mary Magdalen in Abbeville," said Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel of Lafayette, Louisiana, in a statement posted on Facebook. "The quick response of the Abbeville PD and alert parishioners is a great example of caring for the most vulnerable in our community. Let us pray for an end to all threats of violence to innocent human life."

An additional statement sent to the parishioners of St. Mary Magdalen stated, "this morning, our First Communion ceremony was interrupted when a suspicious person opened the back door. The individual was immediately confronted by parishioners, escorted outside and the police were called. The individual was quickly apprehended by Abbeville Police Department and is in their custody. Once apprehended, law enforcement entered the church to make sure there was no additional danger. This

understandably caused panic. While we realize this was a frightening experience for those in attendance, we are incredibly grateful to both parishioners and police officers for acting quickly to ensure the safety of all."

The statement continued, "Chief Mike Hardy is handling the investigation with cooperation of the Vermilion Parish Sheriff’s office and assistance from the FBI. Out of an abundance of caution, we will have uniformed law enforcement at all upcoming Masses. We invite First Communicants to receive First Holy Communion at whichever Mass they choose to attend this weekend. We are grateful for all the prayers for our St. Mary Magdalen community."

Later in the afternoon on May 11, DuPre posted an image of the church's altar on Facebook with the caption: "I'm going back to the safest place on earth, next to His Holy Cross and His Mother. See y'all at the 4 pm Mass."

He encouraged parishioners to comment which Mass they would be attending this weekend below the post, saying, "We will not give up the holy ground of our hearts or our St Mary Magdalen Catholic Church to fear. Thank you all for your prayers and support!"