

THE POWER **3** OF PRAYER

Dear Church Family,

Like you perhaps, I found myself deeply moved by the tragedy that struck 24-year-old Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin live on Monday Night Football last week. Hamlin took a hit to the chest that caused cardiac arrest, stopping his heart. Medical personnel rushed to Hamlin on the field, working for nine minutes to restart his heart. Shocked players huddled and dropped to their knees in prayer. Millions watched the drama unfold on television, adding their prayers for the young man.

More prayer was offered on ESPN, of all places, when a courageous analyst, Dan Orlovsky, didn't just pay lip service by urging viewers to pray for Hamlin. Instead, he said, "I want to pray for Damar Hamlin right now." So he bowed his head, closed his eyes and lifted up the stricken player in a heartfelt appeal to God. Two ESPN colleagues bowed their heads in prayer with him.

Millions more have since joined in prayer for Hamlin –and God is answering those prayers. Four days after his injury, Hamlin was taken off a ventilator and is now able to talk and breathe on his own. Despite the minutes without oxygen on the field, doctors say his neurological condition is excellent. Hamlin tweeted his love and thanks to all who prayed, adding "keep praying for me." The hashtag #prayforDamar was trending on Twitter.

It's beautiful, welcome, and long overdue to see so many, including the NFL, recognize our need for God and openly call on him for help. It is interesting to see that during times of crisis, most people have an inclination to reach for the transcendent and to call out for help to a sovereign, supreme being. This universal inclination seems to point to an innate consciousness of God, even among unbelievers.

Public prayer is an American tradition that dates to our infancy as a people. But it's becoming rare in our nation of late, under continued secular pressure. At least one politician derided calls for prayer in 2019 after a shooter killed some 49 people in a horrible massacre at a New Zealand mosque. She tweeted at the time, "What good are your thoughts and prayers when they don't even keep the pews safe?" The truth, of course, is that God hears and answers prayer. Jesus emphatically told his followers, "Ask and it will be given to you," inviting you and me to call on God for our needs.

We have the First Amendment right as Americans to pray in public, to call on God to hear and answer our petitions. Despite the mockery and disdain some may send our way when we pray, it's important that we exercise and use our right to acknowledge God and pray in public.

Our nation's first president, George Washington, declared prayer is not just a right but a duty. In his 1789 Thanksgiving Proclamation, Washington said it is "the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor." Prayer has been pivotal at many junctures in our nation's life. Americans have called on God in times of war and peace. And now a horrific football injury has focused our nation's attention, reminding us all of the importance and power of prayer.

The story of what God is doing in this nation-gripping event is not over. Keep praying for Damar and for America, that we may as a nation call upon him and his son, Jesus Christ, in repentance and faith.

For Christ and His Church,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert J. Pacienza". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "R" and "P".

Pastor Rob Pacienza