

# Dioceses brace for damage as Hurricane Sally slams into Gulf Coast

WASHINGTON (CNS) – A Catholic archdiocese and two dioceses in three states are assessing damage from what's being referred to as catastrophic flooding caused by Hurricane Sally.

The Archdiocese of Mobile, Alabama, began preparing early and closed schools and offices as early as Sept. 14 in anticipation of the Sept. 16 arrival of Sally, which brought large-scaling flooding to Alabama, Louisiana and neighboring Florida when it landed as a Category 2 hurricane.

The hurricane is said to have made landfall near Gulf Shores, Alabama, early on Sept. 16 with maximum sustained winds of 105 mph, the National Hurricane Center reported. However, Sally was downgraded to a tropical storm by the middle of the day.

No fatalities had been reported by mid-afternoon Sept. 16, though surging waters in communities along the Gulf, construction barges that broke free and ran into other structures, and street flooding that submerged cars and homes seem to have caused damage still being assessed.

The day before Sally made landfall, Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi of Mobile tweeted that "I observed a generations-old tradition: the Archbishop blesses Mobile Bay when a hurricane nears & prayed that Jesus, who calmed the storm, would hear our prayers for protection from Hurricane Sally. On this feast of Our Lady of Sorrows may she wrap her mantle around us."

The archdiocese also closed the offices of its newspaper, The Catholic Week, though editor Rob Herbst posted photos of some of the damage around the diocese on Instagram and other social media, saying trees and power lines were still down in the

area. He posted a photo of a crucifix still standing straight at the Convent of Mercy in Mobile.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida, also announced closings of schools and offices due to the storm and posted local news videos of flooding in the area asking others to “join us in prayer for those in the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricane Sally.”

Through its Facebook page, the diocese posted a video of its bishop celebrating Mass at home the day before explaining the wind and steady rain in the background were part of the approaching hurricane.

“It’s not bad here so far, it’s just a lot of steady rain here in Pensacola,” said Bishop William A. Wack, who also described the skies outside as dark. “We’re hoping for the best ... and we’re all hunkering down and praying.”

Even as he prayed for those in the path of the hurricane, Bishop Wack also prayed for those affected by the wildfires in the West.

“Just keep praying for us and those who are in harm’s way because of the storm and the fires,” he said as he concluded Mass.

The neighboring Diocese of Biloxi, Mississippi, also posted a video of a Mass, but there was no mention of damage or the conditions in the area.