

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 3, 2008 A

NEXT SUNDAY IS CATHOLIC APPEAL SUNDAY IN OUR DIOCESE

Next weekend is the annual **Catholic Appeal** in our Diocese. **Catholic Appeal** is the way that the 80 parishes and 10 missions in our Diocese work together to fund the ministries and administration of our central office.

Each parish is assessed 15% of their total *Offertory income* for the previous fiscal year. 2006-2007. Because our offertory income increased 6% during that fiscal year, our assessment this year has increased by 6%. We are *not* assessed on any other parish income e.g. bingo, Faith in Our Future etc.

Five Levels of Giving in 2007

Newcomers to our parish who are in a position to participate in our *Catholic Appeal* sometimes wonder what kind of gift to give to our *Catholic Appeal*. A general guideline is to “*give as the Lord has given to you.*” “*We desire not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.*” In our parish we received gifts ranging from \$5 to \$7,500.

If you are in a position to be a *major donor*, by giving a gift of a \$2,000 or more, please consider doing so. If you cannot be a major donor, give at a level that you can and makes you feel good about your gift.

- Last year 55 parishioners gave gifts of \$1,000 or more to our **Catholic Appeal** totaling \$82,041.
- 113 Parishioners gave gifts between \$500 and \$999 totaling \$68,712.
- 170 Parishioners gave gifts between \$250 and \$499 totaling \$59,183.
- 360 Parishioners gave gifts between \$100 and \$249 totaling \$52,123.
- 315 Parishioners gave gifts between \$5 and \$99 totaling \$12,873.

All levels of giving are welcome and appreciated. If you plan to give a gift of let's say \$200 and could easily give \$300, consider doing so. Our goal of **\$257,000** is a huge amount of money to receive pledges for in a few weeks. But we know we can do it when **all** of us pull together.

I am **most grateful** to all of you who year after year give to our *Catholic Appeal* and help us take care of a huge financial responsibility. I know that if your financial situation allows you to participate again this year, you will do so. I am well aware that people's financial situation can dramatically change in a year.

A Word to our non-registered parishioners and to our winter parishioners.

I have come to be aware that some people come to our parish for years and do not register. Registration in a parish is a personal choice that each person must make for him/herself. If we decide not to register because we do not want to participate in the financial responsibilities of the parish, even though we are in a position to do so, then we have made a selfish and greedy decision. If you come to church on a regular basis and enjoy the services offered by the parish, then I would hope you would also take serious your responsibility to help your parish take care of its financial responsibilities. If you contribute to Catholic Appeal, (actually, write checks to Ascension Church) please know that we will *not* register you. You will only become an *official* member of the parish when *you* decide to do so. Envelopes will be in the pews next Sunday to allow you to participate if you choose to do so.

Winter Parishioners. We welcome all of our winter parishioners. I know that many of you are registered and play an active part financially and service wise to our parish while you are here. Thank you. I realize that most of you have some form of **Catholic Appeal** in your home diocese. If you are here six months, perhaps you can give 50% of what you normally set aside for the funding of our diocese. If you are only here three or four months, perhaps you might consider sharing with us 25% of what you set aside to help our diocese.

Something to Think About

In his book *The Treasure Principle—Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving*, Randy Alcorn speaks about six Treasure Principles. The sixth principle states:

**God prospers me not to raise
my standard of living
but to raise my standard of giving**

What a beautiful thought to reflect on and act on. The above saying is the kind of one that motivates me to increase my giving. God blesses us financially so that we can be *more generous* and not *more selfish*. Too often in our world when people are financially blessed they only use their newfound wealth to *raise their standard of living and omit to raise their level of giving*. The above principle reminds us that if God blesses us financially he does so *primarily* to give us the opportunity (and joy) to raise our level of giving. Sure we may raise our standard of living a bit, but God's generosity to us is primarily intended to make us more generous and not greedier. When we use

God's financial blessings to *primarily* raise our standard of living we place ourselves in a poor position to raise our level of giving.

In Alcorn's book, *Treasure Principle #5* states: "*Giving is the only antidote to materialism.*" Another way of stating this principle might be: 'giving and sharing is God's medicine for our greedy tendencies'. My assumption is most, if not all of us, have greedy tendencies and if these are not kept in check we will become greedy people — people who use God's blessing *not* as a wonderful opportunity to bless others but only as an opportunity to bless ourselves and our families. How sad that would be. I believe the only way to keep our greedy or materialistic tendencies in check is to be *consistent* in setting aside a portion of our income to support our church family and the poor.

Lent Begins this Wednesday

This Wednesday is *Ash Wednesday*—the beginning of our Lenten Journey 2008. The word lent means *springtime*. Lent is intended to be a spiritual springtime in our lives. It is a time to make an extra effort to walk a little closer with Jesus and his gospel.

A Baptismal Focus

In recent years the baptismal focus of Lent has been restored in our church, but one can wonder if the faithful have noticed and acted on this shift.

In the early centuries of Christianity, Lent was the final period of preparation for all who were preparing for baptism (i.e. the *Elect*). For the already baptized, Lent was a time to prepare oneself for the renewal of one's baptismal promises.

If we embrace the baptismal focus of Lent, it may mean that we will approach it in a radically different way. The question will not be: what am I 'giving up'? Rather the question will be" what do I need to do to deepen my baptismal commitment to Christ? It would be a bit like a married couple asking: what do we need to do to deepen our marital commitment to each other? A Lenten journey rooted in baptism will involve facing attitudes and behaviors that are not Christ like. A Lenten journey rooted in baptism will mean opening ourselves more fully to God's Spirit—who led Jesus out into the desert for forty days of praying and fasting. It will mean looking at the three practices of Lent; *prayer, fasting and almsgiving* and using them to deepen our commitment to Christ.

Prayer

In and through prayer we make room for God in our lives. We allow God and his word to have input into how we are living our lives. During Lent, a special form of *communal prayer* is the *Stations of the Cross*, each Friday at 5:30 PM in church.

Fasting

If Jesus fasted for forty days from food, we need to consider some form of fasting from food. In doing so we experience in a little way the hunger of millions of our brothers and sisters. Some of us may decide to fast from some food that we like or fast in a special way one day a week. Other forms of fasting have to do with fasting from T.V., the internet, gossip etc.

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is a way we reach out to the poor by sharing money, clothing and food. There is also a form of almsgiving that is connected with forgiveness... St. Augustine writes: *There are many kinds of alms, the giving of which helps us to obtain pardon for our sins; but none is greater than that by which we forgive from our heart a sin that someone has committed against us.*"

Almsgiving is one concrete way to express solidarity with the poor and needy. **This Ash Wednesday, we will have an almsgiving collection for the Gift of Water ministry.**

Operation Rice Bowl is a ministry of Catholic Relief Services whose mission is to represent our church in many parts of the world. On Ash Wednesday you will be offered a Rice Bowl which you can use to place loose change in during Lent. Return your offering Palm Sunday or on Holy Thursday.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving, like three legs of a tripod, make up the traditional practices of Lent. Prayers nourishes our spirits. Fasting disciplines our bodies, helps us seek the Lord with greater intensity and puts us in solidarity with those who suffer. And works of charity enlarge our hearts as we commit ourselves to the good of others. Properly utilized, fasting, prayer and almsgiving will facilitate a change of heart. They are not the point of Lent. Rather, they are the spiritual tacks that help us 'put on Christ' a little more.

Many Possibilities

Many spiritual exercises are available to us this Lent. Each one has to decide which one(s) will help us to renew or deepen our relationship with the Lord. I encourage you to seek the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as you think about a Lenten focus: "*Holy Spirit help me to see where conversion and a change of heart is needed in my life.*"

A Happy and Blessed Lent,

