

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



5th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - February 5, 2006 B

NEXT SUNDAY IS CATHOLIC APPEAL SUNDAY IN OUR DIOCESE

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

If you participated in our *Catholic Appeal* last year you will at this time have received a mailing from our Diocese outlining how *Catholic Appeal* monies are spent.

Each parish is assessed 15% of their total offertory income for the previous fiscal year—'04—'05. Because you were particularly generous during the '04—'05 fiscal year, our income increased 15%. As a result our *Catholic Appeal* has increased 15% this year. Last year our assessment was \$204,000. This year our assessment is **\$234,000**. This year our offertory has increased very little. As a result our *Catholic Appeal* assessment next year should be very close to what it is this year.

Our challenge now is to get through this year—a year in which many of you good people are also helping us meet our *Faith In Our Future* campaign goal. So, I know it is going to require extra generosity from many of you.

My appeal to you is to do the best you can. I have every confidence that those of you who have been generous in the past will also be generous once again if your financial situation allows it. I am aware that some people's financial situation can change quite a bit in the space of a year—for better or for worse.

If your financial situation continues to be pretty good, I am hoping that you will be in a position to increase last year's gift by 15%. I often say, we are fortunate to be in a position to give. Some parishioners are not. Some who cannot participate would love to be able to do so. My word to those in that difficult situation is: 'please don't feel bad. I pray your financial situation changes soon. I ask that you participate by praying that those of us who can be generous will in fact do so.

Five Levels of Giving in '05

Since last February we have had a lot of people register in our parish (and of course a good number move elsewhere). Some of our newly registered have been here for several years. Some are new in the area. Some

newcomers wonder what kind of gift they should make to our *Catholic Appeal*. My general response is: "Give as the Lord has given to you". If you have been financially blessed, then let your gift reflect the Lord's goodness to you. In our parish we receive donations ranging from \$5 to \$3,000.

If you are in a position to be a *major donor*, by giving a gift of a \$1,000 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 46 parishioners gave \$1,000 or more to our *Catholic Appeal* totaling \$59,286.
- 121 parishioners gave a gift between \$500 and \$999 totaling \$69,784.
- 197 parishioners gave a gift between \$250 and \$499 totaling \$68,353.
- 388 parishioners gave a gift between \$100 and \$249 totaling \$55,358
- 350 parishioners gave a gift between \$5 and \$99 totaling \$14,833.

All levels of giving are welcome and appreciated.

If you plan to give a gift of lets say \$200 and could easily give \$300, consider doing so. Our goal of **\$234,000** 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.

"Everyone Can Give Something. Be a Player in Your Parish Family"

Giving of our resources, be it Time, Treasure or Talent, not only blesses others and makes us feel good, but most important it makes us a good and responsible steward of God's blessings. Some people tend to think that just because they can not give, lets say \$100, it is not worth their while giving at all. Such people have obviously forgotten the beautiful widow's mite story in the gospel (Mark 12:41-44) in which Jesus *praises* the *generosity* of the poor widow because her gift of a few pennies was a *sacrificial gift* for her. She gave from her *substance* and not from her *leftovers*. Her giving cost her something. Probably not many of us give with the spirit of the poor widow (expect perhaps some poor widows in our parish), but all of us can give generously and hope the Lord who can see into our hearts (and checkbooks)

will look kindly on the gift we give to our parish or diocese. So brothers and sisters even if you are not in a position to give a big or even medium size gift, give what you can and know the Lord will look kindly on your gift.

A Word to Non-Registered Parishioners and Winter Parishioners

If you are not registered in our parish and come here on a regular basis, I hope you will choose to help your family reach its *Catholic Appeal* goal. Next weekend, *Catholic Appeal* envelopes will be in the pews.

If you choose to give you need not worry about us registering you. You will only become an official member of the parish when you choose to register.

We welcome our winter parishioners. Many of you are registered here, many are not. 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 your 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.

A Word to Those Who Do Not Participate

Each year about a third of our registered parishioners carry the burden of our *Catholic Appeal*. I think this is very sad and from a justice viewpoint not fair. When we can participate but choose not to, we are saying: “*Let others pay my portion.*” This is especially sad and unfair when a bunch of “those others” may be financially in a much poorer situation than those who choose not to participate. I doubt our good Lord would look very kindly on that. Acts 5:1-11 has a very telling story about hoarding the Lord’s blessings.

Brothers and sisters, I am **very, very grateful** to all of you who year after year help us to not only reach our *Catholic Appeal* goal, but exceed it. *I never take your generosity for granted.* As you probably know, the parish gets to keep whatever we collect over and above our goal. Every pastor is always grateful for the ‘windfall’ that comes from going above our goal. Remember our assessment does not go up because we collected more than our goal. As stated earlier, our assessment is 15% of our total *offertory income*; (not any other income such as bingo, Faith In Our Future dollars etc.) Whatever you decide to give to *Catholic Appeal* do it cheerfully and not begrudgingly for “*the Lord loves the cheerful giver.*” (2 Cor. 9:7) I know the Diocese mailed many of you a letter with the opportunity to give *directly* to the Diocese. My

preference is that you give through the parish to make sure our parish gets credit for your gift.

Some Food for Thought in the Area of Financial Giving.

In the past few years, my giving to both church and charity has increased considerably. My hope and intention is to increase my level of giving more and more. Since I can’t take it with me when I die, I might as well experience the joy of giving while I live. The thing that motivates me to increase my level of giving is reading articles and listening to tapes about financial giving and stewardship. Presently, I am reading a little book called *The Treasure Principle—Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving*, by Randy Alcorn, Multnomah books. Websites: www.mpbooks.com and www.bigchangemoments.com.

In his book, Alcorn speaks about six Treasure Principles. The sixth one 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 new found 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 more greedy. 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.

Alcorn in his book also reminds us that “*we are not owners of the store. We only work there.*” I wonder how many of us believe this? Speaking for myself, I am still not there yet. But I am gradually working on it. It takes a big conversion of heart to take on completely the *mindset* that we *own nothing* that we are merely stewards or managers of all that God has placed in our care. And our divine Owner has real expectations that we be responsible stewards or managers of all that he has placed in our care—be it time, talent, financial resources etc.

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.

What About Our Inheritance Asset’s?

All or nearly all parents with children want to leave some of their money to their children. Some, maybe many parent’s leave *all* their financial resources to their children. Frankly, I don’t believe that this is what God would want of us—especially where we have children who have received a good education and/enjoy a decent standard of living. Parent’s primary responsibility regarding their children is to love them and give them a good education if they can afford it. If parents have done that, they have taken care of their responsibility toward their children.

Planning your Last Will and Testament is a wonderful opportunity for us to be good and responsible stewards of God’s blessings—especially to support causes that daily work to improve the lot of the poor. In fact our Last Will and Testament will be for most of us our *biggest opportunity* to give very significant gifts to good causes. If we buy into the scriptural belief that we are ‘not owners of the store but only managers’ then the question arises how would God want us to use the financial assets we have accumulated over the course of our lives. I doubt he would want us to give the vast bulk of our assets to children who are already enjoying a good standard of living. I realize in saying the above that some adult children reading this column may not be too happy with my viewpoint. I simply invite you to reflect on this area of your life and to reflect on the *huge decisions* that all of us make when making out our Last Will and Testament. It is our last opportunity to make a significant difference to good causes and our church family. While my first suggestion is encourage people to give to the poor and those ministries that daily work with the poor, I would hope that many of you might also consider giving a gift to your church family or to our *School Endowment*. In the years ahead, financing Catholic Schools is going to be a huge challenge. It already is a big challenge. Ideally for all of us, a big piece of our legacy is a life of extensive giving back to the wider communities we belong to. We do this after

the example of Him who gave his life that we could have eternal life with Him in heaven.

PRAYER OF GOOD STEWARD

God our Father,
we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ,
the Saviour of all people.
Help us to take every talent and gift, which we
possess and to lay them on the altar of your service,
that we too may be used to bring others to you.
Help us to be ready to give,
and even to sacrifice, our time,
our energy, our money,
to spread Christ’s message
wherever we live and to share with
others the life of Christ which is in us.
Help us so to live that by our word
and our lives many more may be moved
to give their minds and heart to you.
God our Father, hear this prayer through our Saviour
Jesus Christ. Amen

Lenten Small Groups

In church today you had an opportunity to sign up for a Lenten small group. If you didn’t sign up and would still like to join a group, call Deacon Mike at the parish office—254-1595 ext 3076 or email him at mmcelwee@ascensioncatholicsch.org. Also, please consider *taking the initiative* to form a group amongst parishioners or non-parishioners whom you know. We will furnish you with the materials you need. Also on Tuesday, February 21, at 7PM in the Ministry Center, I will have a training session for new facilitators of a small group.

Lenten Devotional Materials

This weekend, we offer you several Lenten devotional aids. (Lent this year begins March 1). I hope you consider sharing them with family members who live elsewhere. Most parishes do not provide such Lenten devotionals. Also consider sharing them with your neighbors and co-workers and non-church goers. A suggestion: If you choose to share Lenten devotionals, wait to do so until a few days before Lent begins. If you give them weeks before hand, there is a good chance the devotionals will get lost or forgotten. Sharing good reading materials is a very simple way for us to share the Good News. In our second reading today, Paul tells us that we are “stewards of the Good News of the Gospel that has been entrusted to us”. He also says: “woe to me if I do not preach (or in your case share) the Good News.” Earlier I spoke about opportunities to use our financial resources to support good causes. Sharing

Lenten materials (or joining a small group) is a *wonderful opportunity* to share the Good News of the gospel. It is especially a good opportunity to share reading materials that may touch the hearts of family members who do not attend church. If we run out of Lenten devotional materials, more will be ordered.

Have a great week and I *love* being the pastor of such a wonderful parish family.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F" and "A".