

## Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 6, 2011 A

### CALLED TO BE SALT AND LIGHT ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL NEXT SUNDAY

Next weekend in our nine-county diocese is *Catholic Appeal Sunday* when the 90+ parishes of our diocese work together to raise funds for the ministries and administration of our central office. Until last year, each parish was assessed 15% of its *offertory* income from the previous fiscal year. We are not assessed on contributions received in the special *school envelope* included in your monthly package nor on revenues from bingo. Beginning last year, the diocese changed the assessment rate from a “one-size fits all formula” to four formulas based on parish income. For this purpose, the parishes of the diocese have been divided into four categories:

- *Very large parishes* (income of \$2 million or more) are assessed 19.4%.
- *Large parishes* (income between \$1 million and \$2 million) are assessed 18.17% (Ascension falls into this category).
- *Medium-sized parishes* (income between \$500,000 and \$1 million) are assessed 16.9%.
- *Small parishes* (income of less than \$500,000) are assessed 15.7%.

The key reason for the increase in the assessment rates is because some of our high schools (MCC being one of them) has had to receive substantial subsidies to enable them to stay afloat.

**Our assessment this year is \$264,000**

#### Five levels of giving in 2010

Newcomers to our parish who are in a position to participate in our *Catholic Appeal* may wonder how much to give. A general guideline is “*give as the Lord has given to you.*” “*We desire not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.*” In our parish last year, we received gifts ranging from \$5 to \$5,000.

If you are in a position to be a *major donor* by giving a gift of \$1,000 or more, please consider doing so. If you cannot be a major donor, give at a level that you can and that makes you feel good about your gift.

- Last year, 45 parishioners pledged gifts of \$1,000 or more to our Catholic Appeal, totaling \$72,983.
- 115 parishioners pledged between \$500 and \$999, totaling \$77,308.
- 248 parishioners pledged between \$200 and \$499 totaling \$87,349.
- 214 parishioners pledged between \$100 and \$199 totaling \$32,482.
- 476 parishioners pledged under \$100 totaling \$24,548.

All levels of giving are welcome and appreciated. I only ask that you be as generous as you can. For example, if you plan to give \$250, or even \$1,000, but can give a bit more, consider doing so. When we go the extra mile, we are doing our part to make up for those who in previous years had given generous gifts but are hurting at this time.

**Non-registered parishioners.** I am aware that some people have been coming 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 benefit from the services offered by the parish, then I would hope you would also take your responsibility seriously to help your parish take care of its financial obligations. If you decide to contribute to Catholic Appeal (checks are to be made out to Ascension Catholic Church), please know that we will *not* register you. You will only become an *official* member of the parish if and 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 in the parish life, including financially, 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 of six Treasure Principles. The sixth principle states: **God prospers me not to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving.**

Even though I am well aware that God did not prosper too many of us financially these past few years, the above thought is still worth reflecting on. 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 fail 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 be magnanimous in our 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 *solely* to raise our standard of living, we place ourselves in a poor position to increase our level of giving.

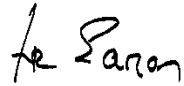
In Alcorn's book, the fifth principle states: "*Giving is the only antidote to materialism.*" Another way of stating this principle might be: "Giving and sharing are God's medicine for our greedy tendencies." My assumption is that most, if not all of us, have selfish tendencies and if these are not kept in check, we will become greedy people — people who use God's blessings *not* as a wonderful occasion to bless others but as an opportunity to enrich only 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.

### Called to be salt and light

In today's Gospel, Jesus employs two metaphors to characterize the essence of discipleship. First, salt is both essential for life itself and valuable for preserving, seasoning, and purifying food. Its value is in its effect on something else. Applied to disciples, they too are valuable to the extent that they influence others. Second, the disciples are a light that shines forth in the darkness of ignorance or faithlessness—like a city on a mountain or a lighted lamp in a house. They enlighten others not

by words but by their manner of living which declares to the world that the reign of God has indeed been established in their midst, and the age of fulfillment has dawned.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.