



Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time February 8, 2015 B

Annual Catholic Appeal Next Week

Next weekend is Catholic Appeal Sunday in the 90+ parishes and missions in our nine-county diocese. If you are registered in our parish and attend Mass on a regular basis, you have most likely received a letter from the diocese regarding Catholic Appeal.

For those of you who are new to our parish, Catholic Appeal is the way all the parishes of our diocese join together to fund the administration and ministries of our central office, viz., **Building Department** which oversees all the construction going on in parishes; **Finance Department** which handles parish finances and audits; **Liturgy Department** which oversees the worship life of the diocese and parishes; **Marriage and Family Life Department** which runs marriage enrichment and pre-Cana programs (couples planning for marriage); **Office of Schools and Religious Education** which oversees the 40 Catholic schools in our diocese and the faith formation programs in each parish, including youth ministry, formation of seminarians, and ongoing formation of clergy; **Human Resources** which deals with the personnel issues of the diocese and parishes; **Fingerprinting Department**; **Catholic Charities**; and our **Sister Diocese** in the Dominican Republic. Overseeing the life of 90+ parishes is a big job. It requires many skilled personnel and a lot of money. The brochure you will receive in the mail will give a fuller breakdown of how OCA monies are spent.

Ascension's assessment this year is \$300,557, which is 19.42% of our offertory income for the previous fiscal year.

Seven levels of giving in 2014

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 \$25 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, we received a single gift of \$5,000.
- 3 families pledged between \$2,500 and \$3,500, totaling \$9,009.
- 11 families pledged between \$2,000 and \$2,499, totaling \$26,620.
- 53 families pledged between \$1,000 and \$2,000, totaling \$76,793.
- 114 parishioners pledged between \$500 and \$999, totaling \$84,531.
- 266 parishioners pledged between \$200 and \$499, totaling \$92,858.
- 146 parishioners pledged between \$100 and \$199, totaling \$23,732.
- 355 parishioners pledged under \$100, totaling \$21,706.

If you can give the same amount you gave last year that would be wonderful. If you are in a position to increase your gift by 5% or 10%, please consider doing so. While all levels of giving are appreciated, we cannot reach our goal without a good number of large gifts.

Reflections on the spirituality of money

The following reflections are excerpts from an article on the spirituality of money by the Rev. Vincent Parachin.

Giving is the antidote to greed and consumerism. Those who share with others demonstrate that they are successfully resisting greed and a consumer mentality. They are more interested in raising their standard of giving rather than raising their standard of living.

*In his book *Jesus and Money*, Ben Witherington tells of his grandparents who were “profoundly committed Christians, dedicated to serving others even when they had a little.” During the height of the depression years, his grandfather gave \$6 a week to the poor and indigent at a time when his firefighter salary was only \$20 per week.*

Of his grandfather, Witherington proudly writes, “He did not allow his culture to determine his approach to money, wealth, work, remuneration and the like. He sat lightly with possessions, and never felt compelled to shop until he dropped. He gave sacrificially not only to his church but to many others as well.

Growing spiritually

....*Giving is a way of growing spiritually. Conduct an examination of conscience concerning your attitude toward giving by asking these kinds of questions:*

- *Am I a cheerful giver or a grudging one?*
- *Do I give liberally or minimally?*
- *Do I give freely or am I hesitant in responding?*
- *Am I generous and magnanimous or am I tightfisted and miserly?*
- *Do I truly feel blessed whenever I give or is there resentment?*

The answer to such questions determines whether or not we put our whole heart into our giving. That examination of conscience helps ascertain whether our giving is truly sincere and from the heart or merely superficial, customary and expected. Your giving can empower you to grow spiritually.

... Giving returns blessings to the giver. This is something clearly taught by Jesus. "Give and it shall be given to you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you," are the words of Jesus in Luke 6:38. Similarly, Paul writes: "Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (2Cor 9:6). The same teaching is found in the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes 11:1. "Be generous, and someday you will be rewarded."

While the specific "reward" or blessing is not stated, what is identified is a spiritual law of reciprocity that generosity and kindness given always return to us in some way. St. Francis of Assisi reminds us that "it is in giving, that we receive."

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, I would hope you would take your responsibility seriously to help your parish with its financial obligations. If you decide to contribute to *Catholic Appeal*, 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 (please make checks payable to Ascension Catholic Church).

Winter Parishioners. We welcome all 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. Each year, we are blessed to have a good number of winter parishioners help us reach our OCA goal.

If you already gave your gift to the diocese, please take an OCA envelope that will be passed through the pews next Sunday and write on it: 'Sent gift to the diocese' and print your name.

Please be aware that *Legacy Gifts*, *Stock Gifts* and *Matching Gifts* are welcome. You can also use your credit card to give. You can give online by visiting www.cfocf.org/OCA and clicking on "Give Now."

Stewardship Prayer

Dear Lord,

*Thank you for teaching me to be generous
as you have been generous with me.
Thank you for showing me that all that I am
and have are a gift from you,
and that these gifts from you, Lord,
are meant to be shared.
Show me the joys of generosity.
Help me to understand that others, perhaps
unknown to me, depend on me for help.
Remind me that my world, my parish,
needs "Good Samaritans" to heal
the wounds of our time.
Make me a gift to others in your name.
Amen.*

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paron