

**7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle A) Homily  
Saint William, Champion | February 19, 2023  
Lv 19:1-2, 17-18 | 1 Cor 3:16-23 | Mt 5:38-48**

Do you ever have the experience of having something stuck in your head? For me, oftentimes it ties into a song, and having spent much of my past life as a cantor and choir member, when I hear a certain reading or Gospel, I connect to it through music, and it certainly colors how I experience the Bible. Two weeks ago, our first reading took me back to a song that I experienced about 25 years ago, and our readings certainly continue taking me back, and on top of it, Father asked me to tie into it... Maybe you would say that God was out to get me. I think that there are times when he puts us right where he wants us – and then only sometimes do we catch on to his plans.

Today we take a moment to recognize that we are called to respond in love to everyone we meet – not just those who are friends or family, but more importantly, those who we wouldn't consider or even want as friends. Maybe they are those that have hurt us in the past, and we still haven't forgiven them; maybe they are those whom we would be embarrassed to be seen with because of the things that, if we are brutally honest with ourselves, tend to want to make us look away from them.

But we hear in our first reading – “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”... and then in our second reading – that every person is a “Temple of the Lord”, and

how the wisdom of this world is “foolishness in the eyes of God”, and finally, to turn the other cheek, go a second mile, and “Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow”. And even our psalm reminds us that the Lord is “kind and merciful” – and I think that as His daughters and sons – we’re called to emulate that same behavior. And I’ll be the first one to admit that there are times when I just don’t want to... I see people out there and I want to say that they deserve to be where they are... but that’s really the wrong attitude to have and certainly not in line with the kindness and mercy of our Lord. I remember the old adage, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Beginning today, and over the next couple of weeks, we are asked to put our faith into loving action through our support of the Annual Diocesan Appeal. And we’ve known this appeal by a number of names over the time I can remember, like the Catholic Charities or Bishop’s Appeal, but it has always been about sharing the plenty we have received in gratitude with our brothers and sisters who have not been so fortunate. That is what it has done for decades, making a real difference in the lives of people right here where we live.

This year, the goal is \$4,000,000, and of that, 60% goes directly to the work of Catholic Charities, and that is actually the highest percentage of any diocese in our country. But it is money that is very well spent and in many cases leveraged to two

or three times as much by matching grants and funding. Last year, nearly 35,000 people were served by Catholic Charities throughout Mahoning, Trumbull, Columbiana, Stark, Portage, and Ashtabula Counties.

The remaining 40% of the money enables a wide variety of ministries to continue throughout the diocese, impacting the lives of over 60,000 families in our Diocese of Youngstown.

Each parish's goal is calculated by taking their offertory amount for Sunday, Christmas and Easter, and dividing that share of the total diocesan offering into the \$4,000,000 goal. This is meant to make each parish goal not only fair, but also achievable, based on the generosity of those of each parish.

And while a one-time gift is welcomed and appreciated, many people find it easier to make a larger gift when it is paid out over the ten months of the appeal, just like we do with all the other things in our lives, like house and car payments, or even a cell phone. And really, it's probably a better way to allow us to stay connected with our sisters and brothers who are in need – because poverty and need don't take any holidays. Maybe for some people, now isn't a time when they can give, but later in the year is OK.

With Lent beginning just next week, maybe a shared sacrifice might be a better way to support the Annual Appeal and show our solidarity with our brothers and

sisters. I am reminded that fasting without prayer is just a diet. Many of you are out there on fixed incomes, and there isn't extra money – but maybe we could give up that morning coffee once a week or eat at home instead of going to a restaurant for one night a month, or cut back on our cell phone plan or the cable or streaming services we use for entertainment. What we find a luxury could help to allow others to have the basic necessities of life.

There are three ways to respond to the appeal:

1. For those who have given in the past, you should be receiving a pledge card in the mail.
2. Take a brochure home from Church this weekend and read it.
3. Visit our diocesan website at [www.doy.org](http://www.doy.org), and click on the appeal button.

No matter which of those three works for you, take some time to pray and reflect on God's goodness to us and respond accordingly. About a month ago, I was reminded that God's blessings overflow in His people – and that what overflows from us is supposed to flow to others. We pray through this Annual Diocesan Appeal that "All may be one – One in Hope and One in Mission." God is not counting on any of us to do everything – but he is counting on each of us to do something. Thank you in advance on behalf of all those whom your generosity will touch.

And what was that song that kept sticking in my head?

*Clothe the naked, and take them to your care,*

*Do not turn your back on your own*

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn*

*And your wounds will be bound and healed.*

*If you share your bread with the hungry*

*If you welcome the poor to your home*

*Then your light will shine, your light will shine*

*And the sun will rise once more.*

I encourage you to give it a listen as you pray and reflect on. You can find a link in my homily on our parish website: <https://youtu.be/Fv6MqVcidcg>