

Homily
October 29, 2023
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
23:40 – 35:42

Our Gospel follows the trend we've had for the two weeks prior. Jesus is confronted by his adversaries. We have heard last week the Herodians accompanying the Sadducees. Before that it was the Scribes and the Pharisees. And now the Sadducees have been dismissed and the Pharisees make one more run at him.

They try to trick him with a question about the Law. That's their expertise – they and the Scribes. But Jesus makes it very clear. *Here is the Law that undergirds everything. We pray it every day.* Even yet today, it's prayed every day by Observant Jews. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is Lord alone. Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength."

And then Jesus dips into Leviticus, chapter 19, and pulls forward another one. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

He turns the tables once again. Using the very source that they say they understand, he commands them with what is righteousness.

It's an echo, these two commandments, of the part of the First Reading toward the end, where the people are told, "Look. If you take someone's cloak in promise of a debt, you must return it to them by nightfall, for it is the only thing they have in which to sleep and stay warm. And if you don't do this and they cry out to me, I will hear. For I am compassionate."

Compassionate: to love God, neighbor, self. To follow the very compassionate example of the Lord. We might get stuck with Jesus winning the verbal battle and go, "Yeah. Okay." But there's so much more here.

There is basically the teaching of, "As I do, so you are to do. If I am loving and compassionate, so are you to be loving and compassionate." No exceptions. "That's who I am. That's what I teach. That's what I live. And that is what you are to do."

Now some of us when we hear we are to love our neighbor, we go, "I'll get to it...uh, sometime." Jesus' command is immediate. There is an immediacy to his call. Don't wait. There is always a neighbor.

There is always the stranger. There is always someone in need. You don't have to look far and you don't have to make a great effort. They're there.

Do we recognize that? Do we see the neighbor as an opportunity for love? The stranger as an opportunity for love? Even people that we do not know – somewhere else in the world – as an opportunity for love?

With this in mind, I want to say a few words about the United Catholic Appeal, which we will participate in next week in Commitment Sunday and throughout the year. The United Catholic Appeal began when I was a very young priest, under Archbishop O'Mara. Then it was known as the Archbishop's Annual Appeal.

But it wasn't really about him. And so, we came to the conclusion that, No. It is the United Catholic Appeal. It is generosity and unity of God's people in the archdiocese reaching out with faith, compassion and building up community. It's there to support and strengthen the vital ministries and initiatives that touch the lives of countless individuals across Central and Southern Indiana.

Did you know you can have that much impact? We all can. We do wonderful things here at Our Lady of Lourdes, on the east side and in the East Deanery – caring for needs. But our reach can be further than that.

A good way to think about what the United Catholic Appeal supports is looking at the ministries and putting them in three sort of "buckets": teaching, shepherding, serving. Teaching, shepherding, serving. These are all ways of love that can be expressed.

We are called to serve, my brothers and sisters. Yes, as individuals, but as the Body – to reach out in service, to express the love that God has given to us by caring for others.

The United Catholic Appeal tries to support and meet the needs of pastors, parishioners and everyone who can be touched by the Faith.

Let's take just a moment and look at those three buckets.

Teaching the Faith – Jesus was a teacher, par excellence. The Gospels continue to show time and time again by word and action, even silence, Jesus the Teacher. – The United Catholic Appeal helps us support education, tuition assistance and care for seminarians. It helps with the formation of our deacons, like Deacon Tom, who is not here today because he is in France with his wife and father-in-law.

His father-in-law is 89 and he thought it would be a wonderful thing to do to travel to Normandy before he dies.

Then there's the ongoing formation and support of priests. Then there's the training for lay ministers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. And formation and support resources for Catholic teachers, leaders, administrators, catechetical leaders, like our own Matthew Fallon, who's upstairs filling-in as a surprise. But he gets a lot of support from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.

Shepherding – Now, we tend to think of shepherding as either the shepherd is out ahead, or the shepherd is behind. You know, with the staff going, "Come on, come on. Let's go..." But consider shepherding also as just "walking along side." Accompanying, if you will. And how do we as an archdiocese accompany or walk along side?

We form and walk beside young adults seeking to live the Faith. We celebrate and affirm cultural diversity in our Church. We walk with those hurting, or in crisis. We uphold the sacredness of marriage and support and strengthen families. We welcome persons with disabilities, like Mary Marois. Sometimes she sits over here and she has her helper dog, Ivy. She benefits from this.

And we promote the dignity of life.

Serving – As Christians, my brothers and sisters, we exist to serve – our neighbor, whomever that might be, friend or stranger.

And so through the United Catholic Appeal we feed those who are hungry and provide shelter for those in need, especially through Catholic Charities. We offer affordable counseling and mental health services to all ages. We reach out to immigrants, refugees and asylees. The latter is a burgeoning program and part of Catholic Charities and Social Services. We assist mothers who have chosen life for their babies, as you well know, through Birthline.

We provide low income and minority students from the heart of Indianapolis the solid foundation of a Catholic education. And we care for priests who have retired from active ministry, such as Father Jim Farrell, Father Larry Richardt and others whom you may know. They have served long and well. They help us. It's ours to support them.

There's always an opportunity to show love of neighbor. And in so doing, reflect the love of God. It is evangelization, my brothers and sisters, taking place constantly.

Let me close with a prayer. This is the prayer for the United Catholic Appeal this year. It's a powerful prayer.

Almighty Father, through your Son, Jesus Christ,
You send us forth
To love as you have loved us.
United in the Eucharist, grant us generous, faithful hearts
As we love our neighbor
As we clothe the poor
As we feed the hungry
As we care for the sick
As we speak your word to others
As we share your blessings
Be our joy, strength and guide,
That we may become one body, one spirit in Christ.
To the praise of your glory. Amen.