

## From The Pastor

This week begins our annual Catholic Services Appeal. You should have, by now, received my appeal letter through the mail. Although I suspect no one really likes such appeals, they are nonetheless an identifying mark of our commitment to Christ and the Church. We give to those things that we most value. We value the Church and the life it gives us; not only in the sense of immediate sacraments and activity, but also in the divine life of God as the relationship and action of salvation.

Our giving to this appeal strengthens the bonds of unity that hold us to the universal Body of Christ. A generous response confirms your commitment not only to our parish, but to the larger work of sustaining and promoting the faith beyond our boundaries. We have, for instance, benefited greatly this year from the services of the Archdiocese as we negotiated a viable and credible Charter School lease. Such services provided are a great asset to us, even as we assist in the ongoing pastoral work of the larger Church.

Making our goal (this year \$37,605.) is a good sign and evidence of our viability as a community that can sustain and support itself, while sustaining our relationship to the larger body of the Church. Any funds over our goal are directly returned to us without the normal Diocesan assessment. As such, this is the most effective time of year to gain additional funds for parish use.

It is becoming clear that we will be blest with the income of a Charter School. This is indeed a great help to our operating budget as well as inevitable capital improvements. However, these monies do not lessen our responsibility to sustain ourselves as a viable faith community. Our viability is determined by our parish collections and financial stability independent of rent monies gained. We had a successful appeal last year, with approximately \$2500.00 coming back to us. We would hope to do as well this year. I thank you for your faithful generosity in these difficult economic times. As I mention in my appeal letter I will pledge a hundred dollars a month to this year's campaign. Please consider a pledge rather than whatever may be in your pocket on Sunday. As a faith commitment, God will never be out done in generosity. Thank you again for your prayerful and generous support.

Today is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The image of the Good Shepherd is one of the most frequent and beloved images of Jesus. Taken from chapter ten of John's gospel, we are given more than the faithful protection of a worthy shepherd. A closer look at the reading shows the intimacy and love that the Shepherd has for the sheep.

Do you realize that Jesus knows you personally? Jesus knows and loves you as He is known and loved by his Father. "I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father..." In this context, to 'know' is to love. To know is not in the cognitive or intellectual sense of a teacher who knows how many students should be in her classroom; or even that a teacher would know the names of all her students. Biblically, to know is to love and this love is complete.

Ponder this for a moment. Jesus knows the love the Father has for him. This love is the longing, the desire, and the joy of Jesus' life. It is the source of his love for himself and for us. The Father loves Jesus with all that he is, and he gives this love to the Son freely. In knowing and receiving the love of the Father, Jesus has this same love for us. This is the love of the Good Shepherd. No one's love or commitment can be greater than that of the Good Shepherd. No hired hand will love the sheep like the Shepherd. No baby sister will love her charges like the parent.

This full and complete identity and love we have in God is further expressed in the second reading. 'See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet that is what we are'. The power in this kind of passage is our willingness to make the passage personal. The words are so familiar that they roll over our ears and into our head like a comfortable coat we slip on without thinking. More than an outer covering that gives us some external identity, the truth of these words is found in our internal identity. To say we are children of God is not a religious cliché. We are the fruit and expression of divine love. We are created in love, by love, and for love. We exist to be loved by God.

To say we are children of God is to say that we have accepted the offer of love and relationship extended to us through Christ Jesus. We say we have been adopted by God through Christ. We belong to God first and foremost. Our adoption by God is the work and action that is the reconciliation gained through Christ. Our status as God's children had been bruised through the separation of sin. Now, through Christ we have been restored to God as full members of the divine family because of the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Ponder how dear you are to God. Consider calmly without fear or doubt how much God values your life as one of his own. The Good Shepherd delights in you and willingly lays down his life so you can know the love of the Father. Express your love and delight for God in return.

Father John Esper