

6th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (February 13, 2022)

There certainly is a lot going on now here in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. In addition to the ArchdioceseOne appeal that is gearing up and the pastoral planning process that we have all been invited to share in, this is also the time of year for the annual appeal for Catholic Charities. You should have all received a mailing from Dubuque this past week about this appeal, and the archbishop has asked us priests to read you his letter about it, so here goes:

“The theme for this year’s annual appeal is: ‘Why Catholic Charities?’ If the emphasis is on the word charities, then the answer to the question is because those works are the most important ones we do as followers of Jesus. Love-inspired care for our neighbor is the most effective way to show love to God, which is the first of all the commandments. Also, Jesus says that he takes personally how we treat our neighbor in need, and that those works will serve as the basis of judging whether we’ll spend eternity in heaven, or not.

If the emphasis is on the word Catholic, then the answer to the question is that we hope that others will know we are Catholic Christians by our love. Also, as the word ‘catholic’ comes from the Greek word meaning ‘universal’, our love-inspired care for our neighbor includes anyone, everyone, no matter who, or whether the person is deserving, or says ‘please’ and thank you’.

And if the emphasis is on the word why, then the answer to the question is...why not? As the Apostle John teaches in his third epistle, when we share our money in support of the Church’s ministries, we receive the heavenly reward for the good deed as much as those who actually do the work.

Thanking you in advance for support of the good work of Catholic Charities, I am Sincerely yours in Christ, Michael O. Jackels, Archbishop of Dubuque”

I know we all get countless appeals for financial support from all sorts of groups and ministries, and I know that we can’t possibly respond to all of them (I regularly throw away about 8-10 such appeals each week). But I really do want to put in a strong plug for Catholic Charities. They do great work for those in need within our archdiocese on many fronts; for example, with individual and marriage/family counseling, helping those released from prison to transition back into a socially responsible life, and assisting migrants working through the legal system. I’ve come to know a number of our Catholic Charities counselors, and they are really good and caring people who do the best they can to help our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are in genuine need. This is one appeal I respond to every year; I invite you to join me in doing the same. You can send your contribution directly to the Catholic Charities office in Dubuque in the envelope you received with your mailing.

When we think of the Beatitudes—those who Jesus declares to be ‘blessed’—we are probably more familiar with the version we find in St. Matthew’s gospel at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Today we hear St. Luke’s version of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Plain (a separate event); we are told that Jesus and the crowd were ‘on a stretch of level ground’. The two versions cover the same basic ideas, although in different ways. For example, Matthew has Jesus saying ‘blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ while Luke has Jesus saying ‘blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.’ Is Jesus saying

that those who are financially poor, with little or no money or material possessions, are blessed simply because of that financial poverty? Later on in today's gospel Jesus said "woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." Is Jesus saying that those who are financially well off with much in the way of material wealth are condemned simply because they are wealthy?

The answer to both these questions is a firm 'no'. The poverty, the 'poor-ness' that Jesus declares to be blessed is that which recognizes that we are fully and completely dependent on God for all that we have, all that we are, and all that we hope for. The 'blessed' one, in other words, is the one who knows he needs to put his ultimate trust in God in every aspect of life—no matter how large or small his bank account, stock portfolio, or land holdings. The prophet Jeremiah in the first reading said basically the same thing: "Blessed is the one who trust in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord", and the responsorial psalm repeated that truth: "Blessed are they who hope in the Lord."

In what do we trust; in what do we place our hope? Material wealth in and of itself is not evil or sinful in any way. If it was, then we would be sinning by earning an income to support ourselves and our families, and to support the needs of others and the mission of the Church—Catholic Charities, ArchdioceseOne, and all the rest...and that is absurd. You may have heard the claim that the Bible says that money is the root of all evil. In fact, the Bible doesn't say that at all—what it says, in St. Paul's first letter to Timothy, is that "the love of money is the root of all evil. Some men in their passion for it have strayed from the faith, and have come to grief amid great pain" (1 Tim. 6:10). Everyone, rich or poor, can be ensnared by the temptation to pursue and hoard material wealth for its own sake, to make it one's own god in place of the one true God. And we've all heard or read of those—especially in positions of power and influence—who have indeed come to grief (as St. Paul said). Check out the headlines over the last several years and you'll be reminded of many such examples.

In what do we trust and place our hope? The far better and more important question is "Who do we first trust; in whom do we first place our hope? That's an easy one to answer; at least it should be. Even our own coins and currency declare what should be true for all of us: "In God We Trust". Let's pray daily for the humility and the wisdom to put our first and foremost trust in the One who created us out of love, who redeemed us out of love, and who wants nothing more than to embrace us out of love in the eternal and unimaginable joy of his kingdom. And let's also pray for the Spirit's gift of loving generosity to help us respond to the needs—material and spiritual—of those around us.