

Catholic Services Appeal 2011

As always Jesus is teaching a spiritual truth. The young women stand for all of us who seek what Jesus calls a kingdom, all of us who have come to realize that Our Lord himself can be the source of meaning and purpose in our lives.

He is for us the bridegroom we want to welcome into our lives. To find him we have to set out in search.

That search is going to take us into some dark places.

We are going to need a light to find our way.

The first coming of that light can be the urge within us to seek Christ in the first place.

He himself through the Holy Spirit has actually kindled that light.

Our Lord is not some elusive, capricious figure who wants to make it difficult for us to find him; he seeks us too. It is very easy to forget this about Jesus.

What is the meaning of some having sufficient oil and others not?

Is it that Our Lord is saying that we must be realistic about the

spiritual journey we are on? Spirituality in a human life does not just happen. It requires effort, time, attention, faithfulness. As with any physical journey we must make preparations, lay in supplies.

Remember how in verse 9 the refusal is expressed? The fact that there is not enough oil for both groups tells us that faith can never be borrowed.

Faith must always be a personal possession and there must be a personal commitment to keeping it alight. Faith can certainly be caught from someone else. It can be fanned into flame in us by someone else's love and encouragement, but once it flickers into flame in the lamp of our spirit, it needs a commitment from us to keep it alight. If we are ready to make that commitment our life can be transformed because to possess the light of Christ is to possess something beyond price.

And yet there is a price to be paid.

One of the tasks that always stand before us is the welfare of the Church. When I say Church I mean the people and activities that reflect the mission and the kingdom of God.

Every year at this time we are asked to consider our connection to the church beyond our walls and beyond our boundaries. This is the bishop's appeal that makes it possible that the work of the Catholic Church in central Texas is effective and that it may continue.

Today I am making an appeal for a number of different groups that have a ministry but no pulpit as such. In other words they have no effective way to collect the needed money to carry out their ministry. This pulpit of ours is today for them.

Through the Catholic Services Appeal a large number of ministries can bring the presence of Christ to where it is needed most.

I want to take a moment to speak to one of them in particular as it is close to my heart. When I was a young priest I was assigned as

campus pastor to what was then called Southwest Texas State University, Now Texas State in San Marcos.

That ministry is the presence of the Catholic Church to thousands of young students who between the ages of 18 and 22 are at their most vulnerable when it comes to making good decisions for the rest of their lives. Away from home for the first time, they are introduced to ideologies and ideals that are not only vastly different from Christianity but many times openly hostile and especially to the truths of our Catholic faith.

Many were the times when one of these students would come knocking on my door looking for some kind of guidance.

We sought to provide Mass, Bible study; group forums, retreats, study groups, and many times just something to eat...college students are always hungry. Most of all we tried to provide a place where being Catholic was something to celebrate.

On Sunday morning when the basket was passed...it was mostly that...passed.

College students are notoriously poor.

There was no way we could keep our doors open and the lights on with what we collected on a weekend.

That's where the Catholic Services Appeal comes in.

We depended completely on the generosity of places like this and churches all over the diocese...good folks who I hoped would want a strong Catholic presence at a University.

Austin as a diocese is home to two of the largest universities in the United States. Along with these two are a number of smaller universities and colleges. The diocese seeks to have a Catholic presence at all of them. From the most elaborate and in fact the largest such ministry of its kind in the world at Texas A&M with its multi-staffed ministry and outreach into every dormitory on the campus to the deacon who volunteers his time to meet with students at Southwestern University, the Catholic Services Appeal makes possible the tools to teach and preach and make Christ known.

Of course there is so much more. Everything from Christian education, jail and prison outreach, Catholic Charities, Respect life and Chaste Living, the education and formation of seminarians, senior adults, youth and young adults, and more besides... These are the ministries beyond our walls and today I have lent them our pulpit.

These ministries are the spark that kindles the flame of faith in those who seek our Lord. But for this flame to be kindled it needs oil.

It needs a commitment from us so it can be kept burning brightly.

So in the name of Bishop Vasquez, I am asking for your help, your commitment. Many of you have already sent in your pledge.

Thank you for that.

Some are still thinking and praying over what you can do. Have you considered this?

What about the same amount as you would spend on cable and internet service?

You spend a certain amount of money each month to bring entertainment and information into your lives, would you consider spending an equal amount to bring the light of Christ and the teaching of the Gospel into the hearts and lives of those who need it most?

May we pray?

Loving and heavenly Father: Today you lay on our hearts a need that only our generosity can meet. Bless our decision to give willingly and with gratitude so that your work and will may be effectively done for the welfare of all your faithful and to reach out to those who seek after your heart of love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

