

Diocese of Venice - Catholic Faith Appeal 2022
Ave Maria Catholic Church, April 3, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

The word “Lent” is derived from the Old English word that means springtime. And springtime is a time of change. Between now and Easter, we are called to experience a beautiful change, a profound transformation in our lives. We are called to pass from the death of sin to the life of grace, from selfishness to generosity, and from unfruitfulness to true love.

During Lent, we pray more intensely and draw closer to the Lord. During Lent, we commit to penance, and by doing so, we try to clear the path that leads us to Christ. Finally, during Lent, we look for many ways to practice works of mercy.

So often, in his parables, Jesus compared our spiritual growth and our spiritual lives to things found in nature. We can compare our spiritual growth to the growth of a plant. A plant has specific needs for its development. It needs water, it needs to be pruned, and it needs to develop itself through the generous bearing of fruit.

In our spiritual life, prayer can be compared with water, which is essential for life. We know we need to pray. In fact, we hear from Saint Paul this directive: *“Pray without ceasing,”* (1 Thess. 5:17). But even though we know all that, we often find our prayer life lacking. This is an excellent time to remember: *“In the desert of this world, the water of prayer is essential.”*

In our spiritual life, pruning is a constant need. In wisdom and care, a gardener must prune and trim so plants can flourish and thrive. Sometimes, we experience an overgrowth in certain aspects that are not beneficial for us and for others. We spend too much time on things that do not produce good fruit, and then we have no time for what leads us to goodness. We forget that loving God with our whole heart, mind, and soul is necessary, that loving our neighbors as Jesus did is not another item on our wish list, but an essential consequence for those who are followers of Christ. Then, we realize we need to be pruned.

Finally, in our spiritual lives, producing fruits by exercising acts of mercy is not a luxury but a tangible sign of our maturity in the faith.

During Lent, therefore, we water our souls with prayer, we allow God to prune our overgrowth with penance, and we renew our desire to produce spiritual fruits by imitating Jesus, who is rich in mercy.

This weekend, our local Church invites us to reflect on these words from the Scriptures: *“Share with the Lord’s People who are in need,”* (Rom. 12:13). This is the central theme of the Diocesan Catholic Faith Appeal 2022. Again, this Appeal leads us to the heart of Lent.

In a spirit of prayer, we must be thankful for God's many gifts. Saint Paul invites us: "*In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you and Christ Jesus.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

In a spirit of truth, we must recognize that our gifts are indeed the Lord's gifts. Then we must correct our hearts and trust in God and not in riches. Again, Saint Paul teaches: "*Instruct those who are rich in this present world not... to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.*" (1 Timothy 6:17).

In a spirit of discipline and self-control, we must wisely administer what has been entrusted to us. Then, we must be good stewards of God's gifts. Saint Paul is our example as he says to the Philippians: "*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength,*" (Philippians 4:12-1).

Finally, in a spirit of generosity, we must be ready to offer our assistance to those who depend on our charitable work. Saint Peter reminds us: "*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms,*" (1 Peter 4:10).

The Catholic Faith Appeal is a yearly invitation to come together as a Diocese to provide assistance to those in need. This is an effort that goes beyond the goodwill of one person or of a few people. This is an effort that requires the attention of all of us as a parish community caring for the needs of those people in our Diocese who lack many of life's most basic essentials.

There is a saying: "*Charity begins at home.*" To understand this is to recognize that love has priorities. We have a particular debt to those closest to us. This means that we must be generous with our family members, then be generous with our parish family, and then be generous with our diocesan family. These are the people that God, in His providential plan, asks us to assist with our charitable work.

The Capital Faith Appeal funds are restricted for the funding of ministries and programs outlined in the brochures that you will find in the pews. The Catholic Faith Appeal is a Diocesan-wide fundraising effort to support programs such as pastoral outreach and ministries; missions, poor parishes and convents; Catholic Charities; evangelization; worship; respect life; peace and social justice; vocations and seminarians; and Catholic education.

This weekend, we have in our parish our commitment weekend. Even though we cannot make an equal gift, we are all invited to make a similar sacrifice. For this reason, our gift

is a personal decision between us and God. We must pray about it and decide according to what God places in our hearts.

Every year, the Diocese of Venice places a goal for each parish. For 2022, we have been asked to contribute \$210,000. By participating in this Appeal, our parish community comes together to renew its commitment to evangelize, form, and care for those in need within the parish boundaries and beyond the borders of our parish community.

Lent is a moment of change or conversion. Lent is a time of spiritual growth. Lent is a particular season in which we search for the water of prayer, the pruning of sacrifices, and the good fruits in the works of mercy.

May God bless you for your generosity!