

Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” Now, how many of you want to get into the Kingdom of Heaven? Ok, so the Knights are out there with some of these little black books for Lent. Actually, Lent begins a week from Wednesday, February 26th, and these things start on February 23rd, so beginning next Sunday. Pick one of them up today as you’re leaving. They’re very useful. You can just read 5 minutes, but it’s not a good way to read it. You can read one of these little pages, 2 pages actually, in 5 minutes. They’re really meant to be read reflectively because they can change our minds and hearts. The condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees was that they were focused on externals, and so Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness surpasses them, you can’t go into the Kingdom of Heaven.” The reason being that if you were like them, we’d be so focused on ourselves that we would never even think about God.

Now the other thing I want to suggest to you between now and Ash Wednesday, well actually between now and Tuesday, Spy Tuesday, that you take some time to go on the web, the parish website, and read there the parish mission statement, particularly the preamble to it. Now, again, that’s one of those things that you need to read and read and re-read in order to get the gist of everything that’s contained in there because it’s based heavily on a document from the 2nd Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World*. And it explains the fact that we as Catholics, as a group or Church, but we individually are a part of that Church. And so as a group, and as individuals, we are part of the overall Church of three very distinct levels. One is the universal level, where we connected with the Pope, and we have a responsibility for the Church at large and for people who are not part of the Church, who are not baptized. The second level is the diocese, and that’s a subset of the universal Church. And with the Bishop we have a responsibility for all of those in the diocese who are Catholic, and a responsibility for those who are not, to reach out to bring the Gospel message to them. And the third level, the one in which most people are more accurately, more immediately connected to Church is the parish. And within the parish we have a responsibility for the larger churches, the church groupings, so for the Archdiocese and for the global Church. And so, for example, we have collections on a fairly regular basis for mission areas, Catholic Relief Services, Malteser, all of those that work around the world with the Pope to bring help to those in need throughout the world, Catholic or non-Catholic alike. We have a responsibility within the diocese with the Bishop to reach out to bring the Gospel message to those around us, to bring support and help to those who are fellow members of Church with us, but also to those who are not, so that we can bring the message of the Gospel to them. And then within the parish level we have a responsibility to bring the Gospel message to the territory that is Holy Spirit parish reaching out to our fellow Catholics in that group, to people who were raised Catholic but no longer attend church, or to people who are perhaps not even baptized.

Now, it’s a very important way of understanding the nature and focus and function of the Church. And you can get it in reasonably short form, but as I say, it’s not something you can just simply read and get totally, but we can get it in the parish mission statement, and particularly the preamble. And the reason it’s important to do that is because of the fact that Lent is coming up. Lent is a time when we’re supposed to focus back in our own hearts and minds on our relationship with God, following what St. Paul says in the second reading today, which is from his first letter to Corinthians. “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, the great things that God has prepared for those who love Him.” So if you want to get to Heaven, you have to do the things

that St. Paul is talking about. And those of you who didn't raise your hand, you might want to think about the fact that there will probably come a day when you might hope that you had thought about that, right? I guarantee there will come a day when that's the questions. Now whether you think about it, now that's another story, but I guess at that time well, it'll be a little too late then, and so why don't you just do it now and be done with it?

Now part of the thing that we're into right now, and you'll find in the pews these envelopes, they are part of the Archdiocesan Annual Appeal this year. This is something that's done once a year here because it's a way of us supporting the second piece that I just mentioned – the fact of working to support Church and the Gospel outreach in what is the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the northern third of Georgia, which we have approximately 1.2 million Catholics in that group, but something like, I don't know, 6, 7, 8 million people generally. Now, I think most people kind of take it for granted. I know Fr. Burke spoke to you last weekend about this whole thing, trying to explain the Annual Appeal. Most of us tend to think, or perhaps take for granted, I should say, the fact that the Diocese can reach out and handle everything that's needed in our area, and that's actually not true. A lot of people think the Church has loads of money, and I've even had the question sometimes, "How much money do you get every year from the Vatican?" Well, I've got news. Zero. It goes the other way around. The Archbishop's Appeal covers about half of the expenses of the diocese. The other half comes about through the diocese raising money through an assessment on our offertory. The difference with this appeal is we get to take up a collection to cover it, but the problem is if we don't make our goal, then we have to make it up out of offertory. So I'm totally dependent on you guys making sure we hit the goal. It's very painful to have to write a check, and I don't know what the new Archbishop is going to be like in this regard, but I'll tell you this much, Archbishop Gregory had absolutely no sense of humor when it came to wanting the money. We'd get a letter. Now if you would please, take up one of those envelopes which you'll find in the pews. If you've already sent in your envelope or your pledge card or you've done it online, great, thank you so much, that's very helpful. I hope you made sure that you put down the name of Holy Spirit on the card or on the thing online. OK, so if you would, there should be a little pencil in there. You can fill out the first part of it here. Now please, please print. Your cursive handwriting may not be as clear as you think. And kind of the final arbiter of what happens to be there, so we do need to know who you are, but it's got a place for your name, Holy Spirit Parish is already stamped on yours, so you're ahead of the game, and then write down your home address, your city, and your cell phone is fine. On the bottom left hand side of that page there are four little boxes: "I've already given to the appeal by mail or online" – if you have done that, then thank you so much. "I do not wish to participate at this time" – that's not an option for Holy Spirit parishioners. "I want to receive a pledge reminder" – no problem. They'll be happy to do that, I think. If they don't do it, we'll do it. And the "I want to receive monthly pledge reminders by email" – and then put down your email address there. And you can write in on the right hand side the amount that you wish to contribute, some preset amounts there, or you can enter your own amount. And then tear it off and put it in the envelope and seal the envelope. The ushers will pass the baskets around at the offertory time for 2nd collection for these. If you'll put your pledge card in the 2nd set of baskets that go around that helps, too, because that means that much less work for our counters in trying to separate all of these.

So thank you all for your attention, and thank you all for your generosity to the appeal, and be sure to take one of the little black books as you leave today. And also take some time between now and Ash Wednesday to read that preamble to the parish mission statement. It's a very solid theological piece and explains the reason why the appeal is important to the diocese. Not just in terms of paying for expenses like the \$3 million that has to go out to support the seminarians and pay for their education, or the over a million dollars that goes to pay for the Tribunal, or Catholic schools, or any of the other programs that are funded by the diocese for the parishes, because the parishes cannot do all of the programs themselves. We rely very heavily on the diocese for many of the larger kinds of programs. So thank you all for your help.