

Giving through the CFA....is giving even more to St. Leo's



This week's message is a printed version of the homily which Father Jarek delivered on the Catholic Faith Appeal. Per request, it is transcribed here.

When I visit my parents in my native Poland I sometimes like to walk down the familiar streets alone, allowing myself to be undistracted. I am always amazed by how much change has occurred in the past 20 years. I see nice homes and cars, perfectly renovated old buildings and cobblestone streets bustling with great shopping, fancy restaurants and eclectic boutiques. I am amazed because not so long ago, the economic situation in my homeland was devastated by communism and living there was not easy. Basic food products and other daily necessities were hard to come by. For instance, to get a loaf of bread or a small bottle of milk for breakfast, my parents had to stand in line, often from 4 o'clock in the morning, because the quantity was always limited.

The eighties were particularly difficult. In December of 1981, I was 10 years old. My father was lucky enough to get one orange from work as a bonus. The orange was my Christmas gift that year. My younger sister and I cherished it dearly. It looked so delicious and exotic. For days we just kept looking at it and imagining that one day we would taste it. We decided that we would enjoy it on my father's upcoming birthday in January.

However, at the turn of 1982, due to strange weather anomalies, the temperature rose rapidly and ice jams caused a record breaking flood on the Vistula River, twenty miles downstream from our home. Many people were left homeless and my parents decided to bring a young family to stay with us. I remember how their five year old daughter was scared. She sobbed all evening and kept asking her parents when they could return home. She cried until my mother told her: "Sweetie, don't cry, Jarek has something nice for you." To my terror, I realized that **my mother just gave away my orange**. Knowing how unhappy that made me, she approached me and whispered, "She needs it more than you. So just let her have it. I promise God will reward you one day and you will have as many oranges as you want." Her words were prophetic. Here I am in Florida, oranges are all around. There is even one on my license plate.

The motive for Christian giving should always be love, not the desire for rewards. But there are rewards nonetheless, because it is in giving that we receive. In his letter to the Corinthians St Paul calls the local Church to give to another church in Jerusalem and he mentions multiple tangible and intangible rewards. He tells them: You will receive unlimited blessings, your needs will always be met and you will always have resources for giving.

The amount of blessing that we reap is limited only by the manner of our sowing. The proper sowing attitude is not just to "sow big," but "sow on the basis of blessings." In other words, we should be involved in doing things which bring help and happiness to other people. Then we ourselves will reap on the basis of our blessings. We will receive unlimited help and happiness in return.

The Lord can also bless us abundantly for our support of the Catholic Faith Appeal. Through its various programs, we catechize children, train new priests, and assist the hungry, the homeless, and the oppressed on a daily basis. Certainly the Lord will not leave such charity unrewarded.

In addition to spiritual fulfillment, there are also immediate tangible rewards for our parish of St. Leo when we contribute to the Catholic Faith Appeal. Let me explain, each dollar which is taken in by many parishes in the United States through weekly collections and certain donations are subject to an assessment, or more precisely a church tax. In our diocese the assessment for each parish is annually calculated based on income, and the bills are presented. Our bill for St. Leo for 2013 is \$420, 000 and it must be paid. How we choose to pay it can have great consequences on the financial health and stability of the parish.

Again, **money brought in through weekly collections and certain other donations is subject to a diocesan assessment or taxation of 26%. However, money brought in through the CFA is NOT SUBJECT to assessment. The most economical way to pay our tax bill is directly through our CFA pledges with what are in effect pre-taxed dollars.** In 2012 our CFA contributions fell short of our goal by over \$170,000. Now we have no choice but to pay that bill using operating funds from the parish with more expensive, post tax dollars. And this must be done by June 30th to avoid interest accruing on the unpaid balance.

According to last year's CFA final status report there are some parishes in this diocese that have enormously successful results exceeding their assessment targets. What is it about these parishes? Are they more generous than us? Do they love our bishop more than we do? I don't think so. I think these parishes simply discovered how to make the CFA work for them.

Every dollar contributed to the CFA in excess of the goal up to 125 % is returned to the parish. And here is the best part: this money is not assessed or taxed. Theoretically, we could get \$105,000 returned to us completely ASSESSMENT FREE. Actually, since our parish has an outstanding debt, additional funds could also qualify for assessment free status. I guess you can call it the diocesan version of a "tax loophole."

I would like you to consider taking advantage of this little "tax-loophole" for St. Leo. If we could set our sights on pledging to the CFA 100% of our diocesan "goal" we could pay our taxes without having to use our post tax dollars from our operating budget. And even better, if we can pledge over 100% of our goal there is that beautiful "tax-loophole" waiting for us to take advantage of.

I want to thank all of you who have already generously returned your pledge cards. If you have not, please consider doing so soon. You may update your pledge, or register a new one by visiting our website and clicking on the "Donate to CFA" banner, or calling the diocesan office at 941-486-4722, or contacting the parish office at 239-992-0901.

You have been extremely generous to this parish. I want you to be comfortable in knowing that by paying the parish assessment directly through the CFA you are not only helping those in need but you are helping St. Leo in the most financially efficient manner.

The orange story of my childhood always reminds me that God's rewards for our generosity are plentiful. As we work to bring the light of hope to others, we actually light our own way. As someone once said, "We become more as we offer to the world our gifts of love, compassion and wisdom." As we give selflessly, we know in our hearts that it will be returned to us one way or another because our God of goodness sees all goodness in us.