

If the end of today's first reading sounded familiar, it's probably because you're familiar with its most famous citation: Jesus quotes our reading when He answers the Pharisee's question, "'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?'" (Mt 22:36). After first citing Deuteronomy--"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37)--He then links this "'greatest and first commandment'" (Mt 22:38) with today's reading from Leviticus: "'The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mt 22:39). St. James goes so far as to call this "the royal law" and says, "if you fulfill [it]...you are doing well" (Jas 2:8).

While this pairing of loving God and loving neighbor makes intuitive sense to most of us, today's other readings give much more depth to and shed much more light upon this critical connection.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches an extreme form of generosity, even toward our enemies who would strike, sue, and even enslave us unjustly. We are to go, sometimes literally, the extra mile even for those who would persecute us, but why? Because, through baptism, we have become "'children of [our] heavenly Father, [who] makes His sun rise on the bad and the good'" (Mt 5:45), and we are to "'be perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect'" (Mt 5:48).

Our reading from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians further helps to connect these two commandments. Loving God is intimately intertwined with loving our neighbors because we are all "temple[s] of God, and... the Spirit of God dwells in" us (1 Cor 3:16). To love our neighbor is to love God, as Christ Himself teaches when He says, "'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me'" (Mt 25:40).

Today, we have a unique opportunity to demonstrate what we profess about loving our neighbors. In Bishop Konderla's 2018 pastoral letter, "God Builds a House," he outlined our shared vision for establishing a three-year plan to build a culture of Catholic discipleship and community across our entire Diocese. One of the core virtues he outlined in his letter is "United in Christ: Enriched by the cultures, races, and generations represented in the Church in Eastern Oklahoma, we seek to build up the body of Christ by loving others with His generous and sacrificial love." In this spirit, the theme of the 2020 Faith and Works Annual Appeal for the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma is "Love your neighbor."

The Faith and Works Annual Appeal supports the shared ministries of the Diocese and gives us an opportunity to love our neighbors across the thirty-one counties of Eastern Oklahoma as we work together to build God's house. When we share the good fruit of our labors through our sacrificial generosity, when we are devoted to supporting the work of the Diocese as a whole, we enable ministries that no individual parish could offer.

We support the development of our young neighbors through such ministries as Sing Praise, youth conferences, Totus Tuus, and summer camp, which reach thousands of children each year. We support the development of our neighbors who are discerning their vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life, and holy matrimony. We support the development of our adult neighbors who want to deepen their faith and spirituality through the classes, conferences, and events of the Alcuin Institute for Catholic Culture.

The Church is so much more than any individual parish, and the 2020 Faith and Works Annual Appeal allows us to love our neighbors across the Diocese in a very real, tangible way. Our generosity helps the Church to build God's house, transforming lives through the proclamation of the Good News of Christ's

passion, death, and resurrection, all for our salvation. As we work together to build God's house here in Eastern Oklahoma, please consider answering our Bishop's call to love your neighbor by supporting this year's Faith and Works Annual Appeal.