

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 29, 2018

One of my favorite memories of doing field work on our family farm was using our 1938 John Deere A tractor with its two-row cultivator. First of all, I was proud that my Dad and Grandpa trusted me to use the tractor. The cultivator was front-mounted. A's were hand-clutched, and you mounted them from the rear, stepping onto the hitch and up to the platform and seat. You tripped the cultivator down by a rod or latch alongside of you. It was an art to learn how to un-clutch into gear while moving the throttle while engaging the cultivator! There was also a back-mount pronged attachment which helped loosen the compaction from the tire tracks, and I think it was activated by compressing a latch-pedal on the tractor's platform with the heel of your shoe.

Putting over the soil against the base of our crops was truly gratifying to me, and even fun! We had no corn on our dryland acres in those years; instead, we had beans and milo (sorghum). As I cultivated (stirred) up the soil to position it against the crop's vegetative growth, I knew I was helping my family's livelihood. (As a side note, my Grandpa used this tractor past age 90. When his strength failed and he couldn't turn the flywheel to start the A, he called upon me with my teenage boy muscles. I would get him going, and then he would 'pop-pop-pop' off into the fields!)

In this sense that I cultivated our farmland, the theme for this year's Charity and Stewardship Appeal resonates with me. The theme is "Stewardship: cultivating love in deed and in truth." To cultivate means to stir up, to put into practice. I see stewardship being cultivated in this way when we have the kids' collection at St. Mary's. To see their faces and body language is a real treat! I think that for the kids, there is sometimes the sense that they know putting their money in the basket means that this money is for God, and that this money will not be used at the grocery store to buy pop or candy. This is a good lesson for the kids, and perhaps an even better lesson for us adults.

For when we give to God, we stir up our souls into generosity toward our Savior. We realize, perhaps indirectly or discreetly, that without God, we can do nothing. Jesus says this in today's Gospel, and it would sound ludicrous if it were not coming from God himself. Without Jesus, we can do nothing! He gives us the financial gifts that we have. We can do nothing without him.

The Charity and Stewardship Appeal comes to us at this time of year every year. We support by our gifts to God many apostolic works that could not be carried out unless our diocesan family came together as we do in this appeal. We support the Family Life Office and Youth Ministry—think of the SKY camps at Camp Kateri near McCool. We support the Diocesan Archives which preserve our history—you can visit there by first calling ahead. We support our Prison Ministry and Retired Sisters.

Our goals used to be calculated in a somewhat vague way. Now, they are determined more precisely as a proportion of each parish's past five-year average of Sunday collections. So, what we have given on Sundays from 2013-2018 determines our Charity and Stewardship Appeal goal. For St. Mary's, it is \$8,360. For St. Joseph's, it is \$1,550. Please make your gift, this weekend or next, and thank you in advance!

Just as I sensed the inherent goodness of helping my family cultivate our crops, I hope you sense the goodness of cultivating your souls' generosity to love in deed and in truth through the Charity and Stewardship Appeal. Amen.