

Bishop's Appeal Homily 2017

Hello, friends, this is Bishop David Ricken. I am so happy to be with you through this recorded message, as we pray and listen to the Scriptures. Today, we hear Isaiah and Jesus *Inspiring Disciples* through their invitation to be the presence of God to others. As we reflect on that invitation, I'd like to share with you how your participation in the Bishop's Appeal can make that happen.

Earlier in my life, I was going through a difficult period where I was feeling rather down. I was sharing these feelings with a priest who was my spiritual director. He stopped me, and looked at me and said: "Dave, Jesus is so thankful for all you do for Him." He said it again, and let it sink in. I needed to hear that message that day, and that encounter has stayed with me for these many years.

Hopefully each one of you has had moments when someone reached out to us in love and mercy and support. We know how important those encounters can be. Jesus, as He walked along the way with His disciples, encountered so many people. As He stopped and listened to them, He shared the message of God with them, Jesus was able to bring them God's merciful love. People's lives were changed as He did so. Some of them even went back to their families and communities as changed people. Others left home and started walking along the way with Him.

Today in the scriptures we hear how God desires to encounter people, and how God uses us to do the same thing. Isaiah the prophet talks about sharing our bread with the hungry, clothing the naked, and stopping destructive talk about others. These are some of the ways that God breaks into our world and encounters us.

When Jesus came, He was constantly inviting the people He met to become His friends and followers. As you and I grow in our friendship with Jesus, and then decide to follow Him, we become His disciples. We are different, and Jesus is able to use us to inspire others. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world as we are inspired to follow Him.

Today, Jesus continues to do that. Jesus continues to invite each one of us into a relationship with God. He so often uses other people to invite us into that relationship. For example, who inspired you to be here today? Who helped you to know Jesus? Perhaps a grandparent, or a good friend, or the people with whom you shared a retreat or mission experience were sources of inspiration.

As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we realize that Jesus then asks us to help inspire others to be His disciples. We do that individually, personally and as a Church.

When we encounter people in our daily lives, we have the opportunity to bring the love of Jesus to them.

We also do that as a Church in so many ways. Today, I would like to share how you may participate in doing that as part of the Bishop's Appeal. As the Church, the presence of

Jesus in northeastern Wisconsin, we reach out to those in need in the name of Jesus. We bring God's love to those who are imprisoned, we support efforts to feed and clothe those who go without. We help our families to share faith with their children through our Catholic schools and faith formation programs. Through the Bishop's Appeal, we help form and train ministers who go out to encounter others with the love of God. Some of these ministers are in our lay ministry formation program, others are called to serve as deacons or as religious women or men. Some of our young men respond to God's call to priesthood.

Ultimately, Jesus asks each and every one of us to bring his presence to others. The Bishop's Appeal does this so many ways through outreach efforts on our college campuses and in our parishes through our evangelization efforts. Through Catholic Charities, we respond to those in need in very concrete ways.

I invite each one of you to participate in these efforts to inspire disciples through your support of this year's Bishop's Appeal.

You are the light of the world, and you are called to inspire disciples as Jesus showed us. Please join me in *Inspiring Disciples* through your participation in this year's Bishop's Appeal. Your gift to the Appeal allows us to support the priests, pastoral leaders, deacons, religious and lay leaders who serve in so many ways. Please consider making your generous gift today. A gift of any size makes a huge difference. Your support allows us to do what the prophet Isaiah calls us to do in helping to feed the bodies and the souls of those we meet.

Thank you for being here at Mass today. Mass is so important in following Jesus. And thank you for all you do, in your family, in your parish and in our diocese, to follow Jesus as His disciple. One by one, as we encounter others, we are able to inspire them to be disciples as well. Thank you for your continued prayers, for your service and for making a gift to the Bishop's Appeal, so we can continue *Inspiring Disciples*.

At this time, I would invite your priest or pastoral leader to share a bit more about how you can participate by making a pledge to this year's Bishop's Appeal. May God bless you and your family abundantly in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.