

## 2019 Bishop's Appeal Homily

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This is Bishop Ricken. I am happy to be with you today via this recorded message.

We all know that life can be hard at times. This was true for Jesus as well. In today's Gospel, we hear how people from his hometown rejected his message. He continued to face rejection all the way to the cross.

All of us have experienced rejection at one point in our lives. Perhaps we shared our feelings for another person and learned that they did not feel the same way about us. Or we failed in our pursuit of a job or a promotion. Maybe we tried out for a team and didn't make the cut. These experiences of rejection can easily lead us to feelings of despair and maybe even hopelessness.

Unfortunately in the world today, we seem to have abundant evidence for the belief that things will never get better. Turning on the news can be an exercise in disappointment itself as we hear many negative stories going on in our world. This past year the church, too, has been challenged to acknowledge how we have contributed to the pain many people are experiencing. And for this I am truly sorry.

During these very difficult times we can even be tempted to simply stop trying. But as Christians, we are called to be people of hope. Hope is a trust that no matter how bad things are, God is and will be there with us. As we heard in the first reading today, "They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Hope, then, is saying, "Lord, if I have you, I have enough."

This message of hope is desperately needed in our world today. There are so many people who are suffering and struggling. They are looking for a reason to believe that things will get better. As people who find our hope in God, we have an obligation to bring this hope to the world.

That's why our Bishop's Appeal theme this year is *Missionaries of Hope*. Being a missionary of hope means standing in witness to the love of Jesus, a love which is faithful even in the midst of rejection and disappointment. It means looking at the real challenges people face in our world today, and trusting that God is right there, waiting to bring healing and restoration and new life.

As I look around our diocese, I see so many beautiful examples of people who are serving heroically as missionaries of hope. I see them in our schools and faith formation programs where our teachers and catechists faithfully serve day after day our young people by offering witness to the hope that Jesus offers. I see them in our parishes, where our priests and pastoral leaders develop creative ways to reach out and impact their communities. I see them in our deacons and pastoral ministers who walk compassionately with those going through difficult times. I see them in Catholic Charities where our dedicated staff brings hope to families by helping them to adopt a child. And I see them bringing hope to individuals who are struggling with an addiction or depression. They assist people who are overcome by financial challenges and need a plan to get out of debt.

When you make a gift to the Bishop's Appeal, you join these missionaries in bringing hope to so many families in northeastern Wisconsin.

While I see so many missionaries of hope in our diocese, I know there is even more we can do. That's why today, I invite you to please prayerfully consider making your gift to the Bishop's Appeal. Your gift will help us to continue to reach out to offer hope to a world in desperate need of it.

At this time, I would invite your priest or pastoral leader to share a bit more information about how you can participate by making a pledge to this year's Bishop's Appeal.

Thank you so much and may God bless you abundantly with the gift of hope in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.