

With our Faith we have Great Hope: *A Message for God's Gift Appeal 2009*

*Videotape message by Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, Bishop of Fargo,
shared in Diocese of Fargo parishes in February 2009*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are living in a time of uncertainty. Crime and acts of terrorism are reported daily in the news. Economic experts predict financial ruin within corporations and households. Marriage is under attack. Families are being torn apart by sin and misunderstanding. The lives of the unborn, the elderly, and the handicapped are at risk in our humanistic society, which bases the value of a person's life on productivity, not inherent dignity.

Without our faith, the uncertainty of today could lead us to despair. But, with our faith, we have great hope.

God does not promise us a life without suffering. He promises those who are faithful a gift of much greater value – eternal life with Him in heaven. And He calls us to share that promise with others.

To share our Catholic faith with others, we must know our faith. Do not be misled by those who will say the writings of the Church are difficult to understand. Do not give in to the temptation that you don't have enough time to read the Bible, an encyclical or a statement of the U.S. bishops, or to attend a parish mission or Bible study.

Those are the voices that want to pull you into the despair of the world and away from the hope of God.

In the third chapter of 1 Peter, we are reminded of our responsibility to share what we know. Then Peter puts the consequences of our actions into perspective. "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good...than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:15-17).

He doesn't say we might suffer. He guarantees that we will suffer when we live and share our faith. But, "it is better to suffer for doing good...than for doing evil."

Before he created us, God knew the difficulties and temptations we would experience in this world, so he gave us himself, through the sacraments, and most especially the Eucharist, and he gave us each other. We live our faith – within ourselves -- by attending Mass, receiving the sacraments, and by interacting with God through prayer and the study of our faith. We live our faith – outside of ourselves – by serving others.

Peter writes, “Let your love for one another be intense...Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:8-10)

We live in a time of uncertainty. We may be worried about our jobs, our families or our health. Each of us is cutting back – in our diocesan offices, our parishes and our homes – as we work to make the best use of the gifts God has given us. Although the world tempts us to withdraw during uncertain times, to keep things to ourselves as we wait for a better day, our Lord reminds us to reach out to others in our own time of need.

This requires sacrifice. It requires faith. It requires a trust that God will give us what we need for ourselves, plus a little more that we can give to others.

As your bishop, I see the fruit of the work of the Catholic faithful in the lives of others throughout our diocese. I see an increase in vocations – with 22 men now studying for the priesthood in the Diocese of Fargo and women discerning religious life. I see dozens of people who yearn to receive Our Lord in the Eucharist preparing to be accepted into the Catholic Church through the RCIA program. I see how our youth, armed with the knowledge of their faith, are able to resist the promised “goods” of the world and embrace the goodness of God.

There is a hunger for the faith – a hunger that cannot be satisfied by uncertainty, but, rather, grows because of it. The work of the Church, the need for the Church, does not decrease with decreased budgets. It increases.

Your prayerful stewardship to your parish and the diocesan church is needed even more this year than in past years when giving may have been a bit easier. Please pray about how you can use the gifts God has given you to help bring the Catholic faith to others. May God continue to bless you and your families abundantly.