

- From our first reading from Leviticus, God tells His people: *Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy.*
- And Jesus seems to raise the bar even higher: *Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect..*
- And we think: “How can I possibly be perfect? That’s just unrealistic. Unattainable!”
- Or...is it?
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- What is the perfection that God wants to see in us?
- Well...it is not what the world thinks as perfection. The world thinks only of riches, of beauty, of knowledge, of power and fame—all of which can, and very often DO, actually lead us further from God’s perfection.
- These things are not what God is asking of us, and if we do NOT pursue these things, the world calls us fools.
- But as the apostle said: *God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong... (1Cor 1:27 RSV)...so we need not fear the world’s opinion of us as long as we are faithful to God.*
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- And so...what does God ask of us?
- A young man asked Jesus: *Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* And Jesus said to him: *“Keep the commandments.”*

- The young man eagerly says: *“I have done that. What do I still lack.”*
- And at this point St. Mark writes something of great beauty: *“And Jesus looking upon him, loved him...”* loved him because here was a person who was of the single-minded purpose of pleasing God and attaining eternal life.
- And Jesus says to him: *“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* (Mat 19:21)
- Now the Gospel says: *“When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.”* (Mat 19:22)
His enthusiasm hit a wall when he was shaken from his own idea of security and told to give what he cherished.
- In the story we are left hanging. Does the young man obey Jesus or not. We are not told.
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- Now St. Paul tells us that we need not live in dire poverty, but we should live with generous spirit towards those in need, and the more we give, the more we gain.
- The blessing of wealth is not given solely for ourselves, but for all.
- The blessings that we receive are a test: Will we hoard them to ourselves, or will we give as we have been given?
- As it says in the OT of the manna in the desert, which is an image of the physical blessings that God gives to men: *...he who had gathered a large amount did not have too much, and he*

who had gathered a small amount did not have too little. They so gathered that everyone had enough to eat. (Exo 16:18)

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- This is something we remember as we come to our Annual Catholic Appeal pledge day today.
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- The programs of the archdiocese ACA help the poor and spread the faith—two things at the very core of our faith and of Christianity.
- The Church knows that life is very busy, and that YOU cannot necessarily go out and preach the word and do all the good works we are called to do.
- But by making and giving your pledge—part of what you have worked for—you ARE in that sense working for God.
- This is especially important this year.
- That there is a current shortage of priests is well-known, but God has given to our diocese the last few years a bumper crop of seminarians this year—30 of them.
- But they all have to be “fed and watered” so to speak—physically, spiritually, and with education.
- People say: “Well...the Church has lots of money.” But its only source of funds is from YOU, its people, and therefore it is only YOU who sustain it.
- Without you to help to water the tree, the fruit will wither.
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- When God blesses us, He never means to hoard blessings to ourselves, but to give as He has given.
- The perfection that Jesus speaks of is the imitation of God through virtue, and as God gives abundantly, so should we give abundantly...remembering St. Paul: “...*he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*”(2Co 9:6) and “*God loves a cheerful giver.*”
- All of the scriptures are full of blessings to those who give to the poor and the needy—from Genesis to Revelation; what more do we need to know?
- And so...will we, like the young man, go away sad, or will we rejoice in the blessings God has given us...and give thanks to Him by blessing others with the blessings He has given us, remembering the Proverb: *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.* (Pro 19:17 RSV)
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- **(I now ask the ushers to pass out the pledge forms, and the pencils if you need one) and will give you a couple of minutes to look them over.**
- **You can put them in the basket with your regular collection and we'll separate them later.**

Reading 1

[Lv 19:1-2, 17-18](#)

The LORD said to Moses,
“Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them:
Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy.

“You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart.
Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen,
do not incur sin because of him.
Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people.
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
I am the LORD.”

[Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13](#)

Responsorial Psalm

R. (8a) The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he put our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,

so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

[1 Cor 3:16-23](#)

Reading 2

Brothers and sisters:

Do you not know that you are the temple of God,
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person;
for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.

Let no one deceive himself.

If any one among you considers himself wise in this age,
let him become a fool, so as to become wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God,

for it is written:

God catches the wise in their own ruses,

and again:

*The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise,
that they are vain.*

So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you,
Paul or Apollos or Cephas,
or the world or life or death,
or the present or the future:

all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.

[Mt 5:38-48](#)

Gospel

Jesus said to his disciples:

“You have heard that it was said,

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil.

When someone strikes you on your right cheek,
turn the other one as well.

If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic,
hand over your cloak as well.

Should anyone press you into service for one mile,
go for two miles.

Give to the one who asks of you,
and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

“You have heard that it was said,
You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be children of your heavenly Father,
for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good,
and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have?

Do not the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet your brothers only,
what is unusual about that?

Do not the pagans do the same?

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”