

# **Bishop Ronald Gainer's Suggested Homily for the 2015 Bishop's Annual Lenten Appeal Second Sunday of Lent March 1, 2015**

When I was studying for the priesthood many years ago, I spent a summer in a parish with an older pastor. He was a successful pastor who was beloved by the parishioners. He was also very wise and plain spoken. One day when he was looking back on his life, he said: *"There are only two kinds of people in the world, those who are there when we need them, and those who aren't."*

To put what the old priest said in a religious context, just look at Abraham because he was the kind of person who was there. Whenever God needed him, Abraham was there. Then God called, Abraham answered. "Here I am," he said. When God asked Abraham to leave his homeland and family in his old age, and go into the wilderness, to a strange land, he went. And when He asked him to sacrifice the person he loved most in the world, his beloved son, Abraham was even willing to do that. His life is an astonishing chronicle of great faith. No matter what, he was ready to serve God. Because of his faith, Abraham was not only ready, but also willing to place himself completely in God's hands and in active service to the Almighty. Obedience to God will always issue forth in good works and our readiness to do whatever God asks of us.

Lent challenges us to a deeper faith and asks us to translate that faith into active love and service for God and neighbor. Do any of us have that much faith and love? How many of us are able to say "Here I am" to God when He calls us, no matter what the time or the place?

This week we are presented a unique opportunity to answer God's call to **Build His Church** through the Bishop's Annual Lenten Appeal. Both individually and as a parish we can help transfigure the lives of those most in need. We can generously respond: "Here I am!"

How? Through the pledge and commitment we can make each Lent to assure the vital ministry of the Diocese of Harrisburg can touch the hearts and minds of those who desperately need to feel Christ's presence in their lives. To God and to His People, we have an opportunity today to say "Here I am..."

*-to a homeless family looking for a warm and safe place to get back on their feet and finding it at the Interfaith Shelter;*

*-to a single mother who cannot afford to put the heat on and also buy food for her children;*

*-to a refugee family fleeing a war torn nation with only the clothes on their back and who needs the Church to help them find a safe place and warm welcome;*

*-to an inmate in one of the many prisons within our diocese who needs to hear God's Word and experience God's mercy from our Prison Chaplains;*

*-to the pregnant young girl who needs love and compassion to bring her child to birth through the ministry of Lourdeshouse;*

*-to the recovering addict who has found a warm shelter and a sturdy support system at Evergreen House;*

*-to the immigrant who needs a temporary home and help with legal issues, and who finds it at our Immigration and Refugee Services;*

*-to the college student who needs to connect again with God and the Church, and finding a welcome at the Newman Apostolate on our college campuses.*

Each year the Bishop's Annual Lenten Appeal calls us to **Build His Church**: to look beyond our living room, to see beyond our parish boundaries, and reach out in faith with love to a stranger in need. The many agencies of our Church daily provide assistance, support, and help, but also daily make present the Lord himself with their compassion and care, their faith and love. The Lord calls us today to help once again. He calls us not to simply give from our surplus but to truly sacrifice in love and faith for our brothers and sisters in need.

Supporting the Bishop's Annual Lenten Appeal is really responding to God's call with deep faith, as Abraham did before us. It is saying "Here I am" to God:

*the God of the poor and the needy,  
the God of the sick and the suffering,  
the God of the prisoner and the immigrant.*

Our faith demands that our hearts should never be so wrapped up in our affairs and problems that we fail to hear the cry of the poor around us. Humility of heart and the personal experience of suffering can awaken within us a sense of compassion and charity.

It seems like the old priest may have been right: that indeed there are two kinds of people in the world: those who are there when they are needed, and those who aren't.

God is calling us.

God needs us.

God's poor and neglected are looking to us to provide that transfigured moment—when the love and compassion of Christ is manifested to them, giving them hope in the midst of their difficulties.

This weekend we have the opportunity to support and build the work of our local Church in service to our brothers and sisters in need throughout the 15 counties of our diocese. We do this through the Bishop's Annual Lenten Appeal.

I hope and pray that we may be able to support this vitally important work of our local Church. I urge you to answer God's call to help with your own "*Here I am*" as you make a generous pledge to this year's appeal.