

Now that the Super Bowl is in the rear-view mirror, you may have read that the NFL just elected five new members to its Hall of Fame...all extraordinary athletes.

One of them is Roger Craig. He was a running back for the 49ers back in the 1980s and then other teams. He broke NFL records and won Super Bowls.

And he owed his successes to three-times-a-week running “The Hill,” a four-mile endurance run, at lightning speed, up a steep hill at Edgewood Park in the Bay Area. Few others would join him.

That grueling, painful run, with incredible elevation, on top of all the regular training, accounted for his tremendous endurance that left other players in the dust.

And isn’t what we just heard in the Gospel saying something like that? Go the extra mile.

So, some religious leaders have accused Jesus of throwing out the age-old teachings of Moses. He wasn’t. He was intensifying them. He wants us to intensify our loving by writing God’s Law of love on our hearts.

Jesus stresses that what we should do is become the best version of ourselves.

Repeatedly, he quotes the old Law of Moses, “you have heard” - and then says, “But what I say to you is...go beyond the Law.” Run “the Hill.”

Why? Because in his time, religious leaders stressed rules.

But the essence of religion is not rules. It's love. His focus is on deepening our love.

When religion is centered on just keeping rules - there's a tendency to become self-satisfied, perhaps complacent, smug, like an athlete that only does the minimum, just what he has to do to get by.

Jesus wants us to shoot for perfection. Spiritually, of course.

“You’ve heard that you shall not kill. Okay! Great! But what about anger? If you’re angry with your brother, you’re liable to judgment.”

Don’t be satisfied that you haven’t killed someone. With whom are you even angry?

Perhaps greater forgiveness and more patience are needed?

And he cites many other examples as we just heard.

With Lent beginning this Wednesday we have a great opportunity to contemplate our path, our “Hill,” to spiritual improvement.

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With that said, I want to transition to the second part of my talk today.

Once a year, at this Mass, I invite your participation in the *Annual Partners in Charity Appeal*.

Some of you have already made a gift. And I truly appreciate your generosity. But also in truth we need everyone to do so.

Some words of St. Teresa of Avila come to mind, from 450 years ago.

She said, “Christ has no body now on earth, but yours. No hands but yours. No feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the earth. Yours are the feet by which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands by which he is to bless us now.”

*Partners in Charity* is the hands-on way we fund the vital charities and the essential mission of the Diocese every year. It provides for more than two dozen special agencies without which the Diocese simply could not meet its obligation to provide charity and education and improve our pastoral life.

Every parish participates and we try to get everyone to participate by making a gift because so many thousands benefit from our gifts.

50,000 local people are being served this year by Catholic Charities alone.

About 800 young people in Catholic schools are receiving the financial assistance they need to stay in school - while the Office

of Religious Education works with parishes to strengthen education programs for those in other schools.

We need priests to serve our parishes in the future - and educating seminarians for six years of graduate school is an expensive thing indeed - about \$50,000 a year a man - with tuitions, health care and personal expenses. These seminarians don't have any money. And as priests they're not going to make much. *Partners in Charity* provides their education.

At the other end of the spectrum - we support the needs of those now forty-four retired priests who have given their entire lives to the service of the Church.

We assist thousands of immigrants who come to Worcester County - largely Latinos and Africans - offer programs for couples preparing for marriage - prepare new deacons for the Church - defend the lives of the unborn.

All this and much more can only be accomplished by the gifts we make to *Partners*.

Our parish goal has been increased this year...to \$130,000. We need many donors to achieve it.

With all my heart, I hope you'll be generous in making a gift which reflects your gratitude to God for all you have, remembering that the gifts we make must sustain our programs every single day in the year ahead.

My hope is that all our families will make a gift according to their means.

Some of you have received a mailing already. I hope you will return it to us. Some have done so already.

I've placed gift cards in special envelopes at ends of the pews today. Please take one and return it to us, in a timely way, by mailing it, or dropping it at the rectory, or putting this special envelope in the collection basket next Sunday.

Checks should be made payable to *Partners in Charity*, not Christ the King.

Thanks for your goodness and for being Christ's eyes and ears and hands to those in need in our time.