

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I am so grateful for your presence today. St. Augustine once said that the Church is in the position of St. John the Baptist. He meant by this that our role is to announce Christ, to point the way to Him, to decrease ourselves, and increase Christ. We are, St. Augustine said, like the Best Man at the wedding. We are the primary witnesses to the Lord, but only the Lord is the Bridegroom! We rejoice because He, Christ, is glorified!

My dear friends, you have glorified Christ with your lives. Through your prayers, your participation in the life of the Church in worship and the sacraments, and through your generous love for Christ's poorest children – you point the way to Him! And you do this without fanfare, without trumpet blasts, and even with no desire for recognition. We come together today not for recognition, but to celebrate, and to say “thank you” to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are part of His family. This is a family celebration today!

Over the past several years, as an Archdiocese, we have been focusing our attention on the words of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, that we are called to create a culture of encounter, and then to accompany others in their needs. We are deeply aware that we do so from the foundation of our own humble realities. Like St. Paul, we know that not many of us are high persons in the way the world accounts for high persons. No, we are redeemed sinners like everyone else. And yet, it is precisely from this place of humility that we can reach out authentically to others because we know that we share a common humanity with them. We believe that no one is beyond redemption. We believe that every human being is made in God's image and likeness, and thus deserves the dignity of being called a “child

of God.” This is the good news we want to proclaim everywhere, high and low!

Through your generous support of the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal you are helping, very directly, to change the lives of others. Whether it is the support that goes to Catholic Charities to help people in emergencies, or the support of our prison chaplains through the Department of Pastoral Ministries, or helping to keep Catholic TV on the air so that the home bound can share in daily mass, or the child of a family unknown to you who can attend Catholic School because they received a tuition grant that made the difference – in every one of these and dozens of other ways you are helping! In this way, you are helping the Church to be the place of encounter and the instrument of accompaniment in our world, today.

Let us follow the example of the great St. John the Baptist! Let Christ increase, while we take the role of the Best Man at the wedding feast.