

Many people move through life transactionally: I will do for you what you do for me. It keeps society stable and predictable. As long as everyone follows the rules, there is peace. But today Jesus tells us this is not enough: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven.” That would have startled his listeners. The scribes and Pharisees obeyed the law. They avoided murder, adultery, false oaths. From the outside, they appeared righteous. But Jesus presses deeper. “You have heard it said... but I say to you.”

Righteousness is not minimal compliance. It is interior transformation. It is not simply refraining from wrongdoing; it is the purification of the heart from which actions flow. Transactional living asks: Did I technically break the rule? Kingdom righteousness asks: Is my heart aligned with the Father’s heart?

Viewed transactionally, even the cross makes no sense. Jesus receives suffering and death. We receive mercy and eternal life. It exceeds calculation. It exceeds fairness. It exceeds measure. That is the righteousness of the Kingdom. When Jesus says, “Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No,’” he describes integrity — a heart unified and truthful, not divided between appearance and reality. The righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees is not stricter rule-keeping, but deeper conversion.

And this conversion is only possible through grace. The divine life of Christ transforms us from within — purifying

anger into mercy, lust into reverence, duplicity into integrity. What the law commands, grace accomplishes. That interior transformation always bears fruit outwardly. It shapes how we forgive in our families. How we speak in our parish. How we respond to need. How we use the gifts entrusted to us.

In the coming weeks, you will read how your generosity to the Archbishop's Annual Appeal touches real lives. Lisa Menendez will share how Catholic Charities of Atlanta changes lives through the *Read to Succeed* program, helping children grow in confidence and opportunity. Catholic Charities also serves veterans, offers financial coaching and empowerment, and provides parenting and counseling services.

Msgr. Dillon continues to serve the Church, even in retirement, through the tribunal, helping individuals and couples like our parishioners Dan and Amy Hart find healing and strength. Fr. Tom Shuler will share how your generosity supports retired priests like himself and Fr. John Fallon, who have given their lives in service to us.

Analise Oliver, daughter of Deacon Javier and Alanna Oliver, will share her experience of how the Annual Appeal strengthens campus ministry not only at Kennesaw State, but also Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, and beyond. Our seminarian Ozzy Franco, along with more than fifty others, receives formation thanks to your generosity as the archdiocese invests deeply in preparing future priests to serve you.

These are not programs alone. They are expressions of a righteousness that exceeds calculation — love that goes beyond minimum obligation. The need is great. But God’s grace abounds even more. I am deeply grateful for the generosity of Holy Spirit Catholic Church. Each time I ask, you respond not out of pressure, but out of faith. That is the sign of hearts being transformed from within.

Jesus calls us beyond compliance. Beyond appearances. Beyond the minimum. So as we approach Lent, let us ask not, “What must I do?” but “How is Christ inviting my heart to go deeper?”

Please use the QR code in today’s bulletin, or in the pew, or on the envelope the ushers will now hand out, to make your pledge to the Archbishop’s 2026 Appeal. You are also welcome to complete the envelope and place it in the offertory basket or return it to me or another clergy after mass. Thank you for allowing the grace of Christ to enlarge your heart — and through you, to bless so many others.