

Fr. Larry Richards
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Good Morning. Again, we come to the readings that have to deal with forgiveness. And the parable is such a strong parable if we let it speak to us. And as I was reflecting on this last night and I was preparing for the homily this week I was reflecting that throughout my priesthood, or as long as I have been in seminary, in dealing with people who are Catholics – even good Catholics – there is one thing that I think is most prevalent sin, and that is un-forgiveness, and people don't even let that phase them! They sit there and think that they can be unforgiving and go to communion on Sunday, or go to Mass on Sunday. They can be unforgiving and be a good person or a good Catholic, but they can be unforgiving and their relationship with God has nothing to do with that un-forgiveness. Again, I once knew a priest who had not talked to his brother in 20 years. And his brother died, and he died un-reconciled – did not phase him at all! And I'm thinking "holy cow, if we can have un-forgiveness in the Body of Christ, then we are truly not members of the Body of Christ. We have to sit there and deal with this un-forgiveness. Because if you listen to the parable – it's a strong parable! You know, someone owed the master something, and he begged the master, the master forgave him and says "Ok, I forgive you, forget it." And then someone else owed him less, and he wouldn't let them go. And again, that is us! We are all indebted to God the Father. We all owe Him. We all owe Jesus – He gave us His body and blood! He gave us everything! And He says "see this, see how I forgive you???? Every day, every day, every day I forgive you! Now I want you to be that way to others. And if you are not that way, then I won't forgive you either." In the Our Father, every time we say it – and forgive me – how? As I forgive. So, I'm asking the God of the Universe, every time I say that prayer – God I want you to treat me and forgive me the same way I forgive others. Now again, you and I might sit there and say, "You don't get it Father, this person really hurt me." And we might be very righteous in that. But it doesn't matter! We must forgive them. And you know we talk about this at least three times a year – at least - because it is something that we all have to deal with. Again, when I was in Lourdes about a month ago, as I am praying in the Grotto and my head is touching the Grotto in the middle of the Mass and I am sitting there being so joyous, the Lord reminded me of people I haven't forgiven. You know, I always sit there and think, you know, I am very forgiving I just have a fast temper, and it's over two seconds later and it's over and gone! But then he brought to mind people that I have had these resentments against, all these people that I felt had hurt me, all these things – un-forgiveness. And so, what I had to do right there – He said "You can't go any further Larry, until you forgive them." And so there, in that place at 11:30 at night, or 11:45 at night in the middle of France, I would sit there and every time the Lord would bring someone to mind I would say "Lord, I forgive them, and I ask you for all eternity to forgive them. Lord, I forgive them and I ask you for all eternity to forgive them." And in the midst of that, I just kept asking the Lord, "Lord, you know my heart – call forth anyone in my heart I have not forgiven." And sometimes, it is the people closest to us; our husbands, our wives, our mothers, our fathers, because they are not perfect. AHHHHHHHH. Have you looked in the mirror lately? Can you imagine what it is like? The reality is we are all in this together, we all sin and we are all in this. And so if God

forgives us, how can we not forgive others? And again, as C.S. Lewis said so long ago, “we must forgive each other, or be damned.” You must forgive, or you are going to hell. You will be damned for all eternity. I love to say that! You will be damned if you don’t go and forgive other people! I need to hear that! Now again, you are going to say then “Father, I am going to be damned!” And I’m going to say “well, you’re not going to like it!” When un-forgiveness enters our heart, it doesn’t do anything to anyone else, it destroys us. Now, when you forgive somebody, that isn’t a feeling, you might still look at them and think, “OHHHHH!” The feelings don’t go away – sometimes they do, sometimes they don’t. It doesn’t “ok” what they did to you! It doesn’t say “ok, what you did to me was ok.” It doesn’t say that – they might still go to hell for that! All that it says is that “I let you go. I will no longer be victim to what you did to me so long ago. I set you free – why? Because this is what Jesus Christ – my Savior did for me! As He did for me – now I do for you. As I did not deserve it, and do not deserve it, neither do you, but I give it, because this is what my Savior, my Master has commanded me to do.” And then I look at the God of the Universe and I say “Jesus, now you also wash them in your blood.” Somewhere when we get there, we find out that we are all the same. And in the end of time when I am standing before God, I hope every miserable person who every hated me or ever hurt me gets to sit next to me in heaven. I hope somehow, when everything is said and done, all my weakness, all your weakness, all our weakness together – that somehow in the mercy and the love of the God of the Universe, he makes it all right. And so, we need to be people of that forgiveness. And if your heart right now isn’t ready for forgiveness – if you say “Father, you don’t understand, I can’t...” – ok, then you need the Holy Spirit. Then you need to surrender that right now to the Spirit of the Living God and say “Lord, I can’t forgive, you know how hurt it is. So I give you permission Lord, to forgive through me. Lord may you do it since I can’t. Lord I am so weak and you know my weakness. And you just keep – before you leave church today, ask the Lord to bring forth anyone in your heart you have not forgiven.” And you forgive them and ask God to forgive them. If you can’t forgive them, then you ask God to do it for you. And you give Him permission, so that you are no longer a victim. So that you can be set free. So that you can set others free, because if you don’t you are going to hell. And that is reality, and it is much better that I tell you that today, and when you stand before God and He says “why didn’t you forgive?” “Well, I couldn’t” and He says “I sent you the loudest priest I ever created on earth and he told you – you better forgive them.” And you aren’t going to be able to say “well:”...he gave you the way out! You want set free...have a forgiving heart. You want set free...then free others...you want forgiven, then forgive. I know it will be hard – very hard. But God has commanded us to do things that are hard. Not have it our way, commanded us to do it His way. Ya got it? Ya get it? Good. May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.