

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2010

Fr. Larry Richards

Okay. Today in the First Reading and in the Gospel, they go hand in hand. First of all St. Paul begins and he says, "We must go through," what, "to enter the Kingdom"? "Many hardships," is what he says. Many hardships, which means suffering. It means denying self. There are hardships. Anyone who has been a Christian for more than five minutes knows that it is not easy. That is why when you got Baptized we anointed you with one of the oils of Catechumens to give you strength to undergo the sufferings Christianity calls us to. Now again our sufferings are much different but in the world today there are more martyrs for Christianity today than any other time in history. It is just the reality. We don't deal with this very well because we are on our own comfortable place of Erie, PA where everyone is Christian. But the reality is that in the world today there are more martyrs for Christianity than any other time in history of the Church. But for these people to enter and to become Christian it will cost a lot of them their lives. Again Christianity is only 32% of the world. 32%! We are in the minority. And in some places it is against the law to be a Christian. And if you are a Christian they will come and kill you. But first of all we should think would I be willing to go through that for my faith? Some people aren't willing to go to church every Sunday because it takes so much time from their reality. But would we be willing to give up our life and the question it comes down to is if you are in love or not? God loves us and He gives everything for love of us. And so the question comes down to do I truly love Jesus? Is that why I am here? That no matter what the hardship entails I will do it for love of God. And think when things get hard for us think of what the rest of the world goes through.

But then it comes down to the Gospel. Jesus said, about to go, about ready to die, and He says, "So I give you a new commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." Then in verse 35 He says, "This is how all people will know you are my disciples because you love each other." That's it. Now when you love somebody whether it comes to God, your spouse, your children, your parents, when you love them it is going to hurt you in one way or another. All of us are imperfect people. When we love people we get hurt by definition. But we always have to embrace that hurt and say yes I will do this because I will lay down my life in love. Sometimes we think that we are going to get the short end of the stick. That is the whole point. Well if I love, if I do this for God I might get the short end of the stick. You will suffer and so will I by definition but He promises more than any of our suffering ever, right.

Again I told you the story before, I think I have, I took my vow of celibacy; it was October 15th, 1988. I went to sleep to sleep the night before because I was in seminary, a whole-lifer since I was 17, I was now 28 years old and I was finally going to get ordained. I have right before I go to bed what I call my "last temptation" before celibacy and it was no sexual temptation. Don't get all excited some of you. It was a temptation that I wanted my own children, that I wanted my own kids. My very crying out to God that night, in the middle of the night was, "God I want kids. God I want kids. God I want kids." Now of course you realize that that was God's will that I would not have any children, right. He did not want little Larry's running around the world. He says, "Larry, you are the last of the Larry's. That is it. Done! You know. Period!" So, that is okay. So the next day I took my vow of celibacy. Bishop Murphy, God rest him, asked me if I would take the vow. If I would be a celibate for the kingdom, I said, "yes," and I put this ring on my finger, which I can't get off anymore because I got fat. But anyway it says, the very

commandment today, John chapter 13, verse 34, "Love one another as I have loved you." I put it on my finger to remind me if anything I have to do as a priest is I got to be a person of love. Now my personality, as you know, in my personality I must be a person of love. So I put it on my finger and I was all disappointed in some ways because I thought okay that is it. I am done. My life is over. But then I knew it was a new life but it had to kill me first. So here I am I went over and I had a youth group – we had 160 kids in the youth group at that time. They all come running over and they said, "Father, Father," the first time they could call me Father they said, "We got you something." I said, "What did you get me you little pagans?" They gave me a beautiful little thing of the Prayer of St. Francis. I said, "Oh great." Then they said, "We got you something else." I said, "What did you get me?" "Here, open it up." I carry it with me everywhere I go for the last 22 years. I am getting old I know. Anyway I open it up and as I open it there is this little metal of St. Christopher. I said, "Oh yeah St. Christopher. We don't know if he is a Saint or not. What is the matter with you." "Oh shut up Father. Read the other side." Can you imagine the way they talk to me? I said, "Okay." I turned it around and it says "10-15-88," the day I got ordained, "Congratulations, We love you, Larry's kids." So the night before I woke up in the middle of the night and I said, "God, I want kids, I want kids," and the next day He gave me 160 of them and I didn't have to do anything for it. But I am thinking here I am I am going to suffer. I am not going to have my own children. I am going to have a hard life. It is going to be miserable, in some ways. And God just whacked me across the head the next day and says, "You really think you can out give me in generosity. You really think that if you are a man of love that you are going to be unfruitful in your life. Is that what you think?"

And see, that is the point. When we are people of love it is going to cost us. It cost me celibacy. That is what I have to do to be a person of love. And when I do that then God has brought fruit in my life more than I could ever imagine. Think about the people throughout the world who listen to my cds or different things who have been given new life? Not because of Fr. Larry but because God used a jerk like Fr. Larry who surrendered himself and then God blessed it even more. You can never out give God if you are a man or a woman of love. So the point is in our own lives we have got to do that for our own families. That is where it begins, right. In your family you have got to be the person who hurts, who gives up your life for your spouse. That means husbands you are more concerned about your wife's needs than you are about your own. It is just that simple. Wives it means that you are more concerned about your husband's needs than you are about yourself. It is just that simple. When you do that don't think well what am I going to get out of it? You are going to get true life out of it. When it comes to this love thing some people think it is kind of weird that I am the one talking about it because we do it in different ways. Often I have said, Jesus Christ would not be accepted in most Catholic churches. Jesus wasn't always nice, was He? He just wasn't. Remember the story when the woman wanted something, what did He call that woman - a dog. Now you would all say could you imagine if someone came to me one day and said Father can I have something and I said get out of here. You are a dog. Do you think that would get some gossip? I'll bet you everybody would say, "Father called someone a dog. I know and so did Jesus Christ. I have never called anyone a dog just so you know. Well maybe. No I can't imagine. But the reality is you and I do it our personality, right. Fr. Ed Lohse, my classmate, you all know him, He is a great gentle man -Chancellor of the Diocese of Erie. When he was chaplain of the high school, he was a co-ed chaplain, as I was a chaplain at Prep, and he would say, "Come here." And he would call a kid over and says, "I want to tell you a secret. I think you are special." Isn't that nice? Some of you would like to have Fr. Lohse as your pastor, wouldn't you? "I think you are special." Could you imagine me doing that to all of you people? "Come here. I want to tell you a secret. I think you are special." Come on. You would have a heart attack right there and die. That is the reality. I use to tell my boys at Prep I'd say, "Gentlemen if you ever think I am going to say come here I am going to tell you a secret. I think you are

special. It ain't ever going to happen." My style is different. I'd walk through the kids, the freshmen in the morning, and BANG! I would knock a kid in a wall. I'd walk a little more and BANG knock another kid into another locker. Then ten of them would try to jump me and I'd say, "You touch a priest, you go to hell." It is just that reality. I love them the way my personality is and those kids knew it. Those kids knew if they got in trouble and got arrested in the middle of the night they call Fr. Larry first. I got a lot of those calls. "Father could you come help me deal with my family?" "I will be down." "Okay." They knew though I was hard, my personality isn't very gentle, but I would give everything for love of those kids. And it is the same with you. Though I am not always Mr. Personality; no I am not always gentle, but I give my life to get any of you to heaven. That is the point. That is what you have got to do for your wife and your children and your husband. You have to be able to do everything in your power to get them to heaven. Would it entail suffering? Sure. Maybe your husband or wife doesn't go to church so you start fasting for them. You start praying for them. You don't nag them. The only thing it will do if you nag them is make them not want to go to church all the more. If you suddenly say, "Okay Lord to get my husband or my wife back to church I will give up between meals. I will sit there and give up TV. Lord I will suffer for love of them so that they come back to You. Then after a month or so when they are still not doing it, just say, "You know I have been praying for you and fasting for you just so you would come home. I just want you to know." that is enough. God can do the rest.

Are you and I willing to suffer for Jesus, for husbands, for our wives, for our children? Because that is what love is - to gladly give up our lives for others. When you do this in your personality and my personality God will never be outdone in generosity. He will always bless you even more. I promise. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.