

Father Larry Richards

Moderator, Bread of Life Community

April 15, 2001
Easter Sunday

Cycle C

First Reading: Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4

Gospel: John 20:1-9

Last night we talked about the reality of how we have to let go, how we have to accept, and how we have to rejoice. And so we are going to continue that today. We are going to talk about the three A's. The three A's are alive, alleluia, and amen. We first have to focus on the reality that Jesus Christ is alive. Somewhere in our lives, we have to come to that relational experience that Christ is not only alive in what I read in books or in the Bible, or He is not only alive from what I hear about at Mass, and I believe Jesus is alive somehow. But He must become alive for me. If you listen to the first opening prayer today, it says, "May we come to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread." So the first place we have to come to realize that Jesus is alive is in His Eucharist. And what will happen here this very day is that we will take regular bread and regular wine, we will pray over it and Christ will become resurrected, alive, and present before us in the Eucharist. And then He will feed us with His very presence. That we might live also. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." But we have to know that He is alive. You know, I think that most Christians go through the motions of saying yes to a set of beliefs. What are you? I am a Christian. And why are you a Christian? Because I believe everything that the Church teaches. Oooow! The devil believes everything that the Church teaches, you know. He believes it all, because he knows it. Just because you believe in everything the Church teaches doesn't make you a Christian. A Christian is one who is in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who proclaims, with Mary Magdalene, I have seen the Lord. I have this living relationship with Christ.

When I do my retreats, I say to the kids, "I submit to you Jesus Christ isn't God." I just did this now a couple of weeks ago to 70 boys from Elyria Catholic High School. It was a senior retreat, they didn't want to be there, they sure as heck didn't want me there, and I started off the retreat to these 70 boys in front of me, "I submit to you Jesus Christ isn't God. Prove to me that He is." And I would go around and say, "Do you believe He is God?" And one kid said, "No." Another kid, "Do you believe He is God?" And he said, "No." Another kid said, "Well, I believe he is a god." I'm thinking all these years of Catholic education right down the tubes, don't pay for it! And I said, "Does anybody here believe Jesus Christ is God?" and a few hands went up. I said, "OK, son, why is Jesus Christ God." And one kid said, "Because the Bible says so." Duh!

Mormons have a bible and it doesn't say Jesus Christ is God. Jews have a bible, it doesn't say Jesus Christ is God. Muslims have a bible, it doesn't say Jesus Christ is God. I believe, Father. OK, why do you believe. Jesus Christ is God because he performed miracles. Jimmy Swaggert performed miracles, does that make him God? Someone else will say, He died for us, Father. Is that all I have to do is die for you and that will make me God? I have to die anyway, why not die for you? Sure! If I can be God out of it. And then it goes on and one and on and on. And finally someone look and me and I'll say, "Do you believe Jesus Christ is God?" And he says, "Yes." And I'll say, "Why?" And he says, "Because He rose from the dead, Father." Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding! Very good! Now how do you know He rose from the dead? The Bible say so. So I'll say, "OK, ask Father." And so they say, "OK, Father, do you believe Jesus Christ is God? Why?" Because I know Him, I have experienced Him. For the last almost twenty years of my life now, I have spent at least an hour a day with the Lord Jesus Christ. I am in a relationship with Jesus. I don't care if the whole world told me Jesus Christ wasn't alive, I would say you're a nut, you haven't a clue what you're talking about. I know Jesus Christ. It would be like someone coming to me and saying, "Father Larry, your mother doesn't exist." Really? I just talked to her yesterday. I know my mother exists. I am in relationship with her?

So first of all, are you convinced because of your experience that Jesus is alive? Do you know that because of your experience? If I asked you today, do you believe Jesus Christ is alive, what would be your answer to me before I just did this with you? Would it be, well I just believe. Well you could believe the devil is god, too. So what? Just because you believe something doesn't make it real. Can you talk about the reality of Jesus being alive through your experience? And if not, boy, does God have a plan for you! God has a plan for you to know Him. Remember the teaching of the Catholic Church: Why did God make me? God made me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this world so I can be happy with Him forever in the next. So the first thing I've got to ask myself is, do I know Christ? Know Him like I know my wife, or my husband, or my son, or my daughter, or my mother, or my father, or my girlfriend, or my boyfriend, or my brother, or my sister, or my best friend? Do I know that Jesus is alive? If I don't, then Easter becomes just one of those rituals I go through because I am a good person, and we all know good people go to church on Easter Sunday, and that's what I do. Oh, God is jumping up and down! Do you know Him, every day of your life? Are you in a relationship with Him? If not, by the end of the Mass, hopefully you will be.

The second word of the A word, what are we going to look at? Alleluia!! I have a ritual that I've done for many years, and I think I talk about it every Easter because I love this ritual. I got a movie called, "King of Kings." I think that's what it is. Anyway, it's a two video tape set, and it's about the life of Christ. And I always put it in for the last five minutes, because the last five minutes of this video is the Resurrection. And the Resurrection begins, you know they are all sad, they are all crying, and they are all mad. Thomas, of course, is maddest of all. Don't talk about creed, don't talk about prophecy, don't talk about garbage. Because it's dark, Jesus is dead, He's in the tomb, the tomb is closed, and everybody is upset. But then, you see the little bit of light start to come, and as the light starts to peek over the darkness, you hear the Alleluia chorus in the background. And it goes, "Alleluia, alleluia." And then more and more light, "Alleluia." And then it starts the whole chorus, and then they are running to the tomb, because Mary says, "Didn't he prophesy that He would rise?" And then they all run to the tomb and they find the tomb is empty. And then they go ballistic! Jumping up and down, going crazy, nuts!

Singing “Alleluia,” because Jesus Christ is alive. I don’t think we experience that enough. Think about the person you love the most is dying. Think about the person, that when they die, it kills you inside. Now think about the reality that they just came to you and they are fully alive now. And they came up to you and they hug you and they say, “Guess what! I’m alive.” And you would be going crazy too. You would be saying “Alleluia” until you were purple. He’s alive, he’s alive, you would be going nuts! They were dead all this time, and they are alive. Well that is the experience that each of us is called to experience on Easter Sunday. Jesus Christ is alive, He was dead, but now He’s alive, Alleluia. Get excited! You know, the problem again with a lot of us is, we get excited over everything else: football games, going to parties, getting drunk, getting high. It’s great! I’m going to go to a party tonight! Oh, Jesus rose from the dead. Yeah, that’s nice.

Are we an alleluia people? Do we know what it means that Christ is alive. The reason that should excite us is because not only Jesus is alive, but because He is alive. We are alive, we will live forever, we will never die. And that is an alleluia. And if you believe that, please tell your faces. Alleluia! That is the reality of our hearts and our lives. That we need to be an alleluia people. Sometimes we are not, and I think that’s the reason why people don’t come to know the Lord more, because they say the people who follow Him look like the most angry, obnoxious, irritable people sometimes, and why do I want to become like that? I’m much happier the way I am. Are we people who give bad names to what it is to be a Christian? Or am I an alleluia person? And I’m talking about me too. Am I an Alleluia person, that Christ is alive, and I want to proclaim that by the way I live.

The last of the A words is Amen. Amen means I do believe, yes, but more than that. It means I would stake my life on what it would say. That I would stake my life on the reality that Christ is risen. Every single apostle did that. Every single apostle died proclaiming one thing: Jesus isn’t dead, He’s alive! That’s the only thing they proclaimed, that Jesus Christ is alive. And they said “Amen” by staking their life on that. Would we stake our life on that reality, that Christ is alive. You do it every Sunday. Again, I talked about it before. Every Sunday when you come up to communion, and I hold up Jesus Christ, and I say “The Body of Christ,” and you say “Amen,” that means you would stake your life that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, that He is alive, and you would die for that reality. That’s what you say; is that what you mean? Are we people that are truly Amen People by believing not only with our heads, but with our hearts, that Jesus is alive. He comes to me every week or every day when I go to Communion. That Christ lives inside of me. Amen. I would stake my life and give up my life proclaiming that Jesus is alive. If not, He wants you to know that. More than anything else, don’t you leave this place today until you know that, until you’ve experienced that, until you really let go of everything and make a jump of faith and say “Jesus, I want to know you, and I want to know that you are alive, and I want to be willing to stake my life on that, Lord, and I want to be an Alleluia person. I want to be a person that is fully alive in you.

You got it? You get it? Good! May each of you know His love, today and forever. Amen.