

## Father Larry Richards

### Moderator, Bread of Life Community

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**May 13 2001**

Cycle C

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Acts 14:21-27

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Revelation 21:1-5

Gospel: John 13: 31-35

Good morning. I just love to hear all these babies in this room. It's such a sign of life. The Lord continues to bless us and bless us with children, so we continue to offer Him the praise and the glory for that.

Today, as we come together, we come to worship God in the Eucharist and we come to bring a new member into the Church. And if you listen to the readings today, they're phenomenal for this. You know, it's interesting. First of all, if you look at the Book of Revelation, it talks about Heaven. It talks about in Heaven the intimacy with us and Jesus. Let's go there for a second. It's about the last chapter in the Book of Revelation, chapter 21. In here, when we start in chapter 21, John says I see a new Heaven and a new earth. And he sees a new Jerusalem, the holy city, in verse 2 of 21, as a bride prepared to meet her husband. Then he hears a voice. "I heard a voice from the throne cry out 'this is God's dwelling with men. He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people and He shall be their God who is always with them. He shall wipe every tear from their eyes. And there shall be no more death or mourning crying out for pain, for the former world has passed away.'"

This is what happens at every Baptism. We enter into the newness of life with God. GOD SHALL DWELL WITH THEM. And what happens today is we come and we baptize Ryan Michael that God will take up residence inside of him. With all this hair – wait till you see this child, he has more hair than I do! A lot more than his dad! Anyway, God will take up residence inside of him today. And God is living inside of each of us. That's what we believe. GOD SHALL DWELL WITH THEM. It's not just in Heaven, because - remember we talked about before – all the way to Heaven IS Heaven because Jesus said, "I am the Way." And so what happens when a person is baptized, they enter into this intimacy, and the God of the universe takes up residence inside of them, as happened to each of us. The problem is we forget. We forget that God dwells within us. We look at the tabernacle. We look at Him up there somewhere. But we forget that the day that we got baptized, God took up residence inside of you and me. As he will today take up residence inside of Ryan Michael. And that's a glorious thing. And then after we know this reality, what happens is we get to participate in the life of the Trinity. We get caught up into the Trinity of God. And the Trinity of God, of course, is the Community of Love. Where God the Father has always loved the Son, the Son has always loved the Father, and their love is so real, it's the Holy Spirit. And so what happens is when we are

baptized, the Spirit of God takes us up, if you will, and scoops us in to the love of the Trinity. And we get to participate in the love of the Trinity. Beyond us, but also inside of us. GOD DWELLS WITHIN US, the Community of Love. We get caught up into that love, that reality. And that intimacy is real, that if you look at that one verse there, verse 4, chapter 21, verse 4. “He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

I had a girl when I was at Our Lady of Peace, years ago, in fact, the days of Michael (who is the father of little Ryan Michael) in my youth group. When she was there – I don’t think she was his classmate, a couple years older than him – but when she was in high school (she went to McDowell High School) and she came to know Jesus Christ because everybody kind of picked on her and she was having a bad day. And there was a senior there who was in an intimate relationship with Jesus, and he saw her crying one day. And he walked up to her and he took his finger and he wiped away one of her tears and he says to her “Jesus wants to wipe away all of your tears.” And for her, Jesus became so real at that moment through the intimacy of another person. Through the instrumentality of another Christian. Christ became real to her through him reaching out in love. And she became a Christian because of that.

And you see, if we go to the Gospel today, that’s what’s called to happen. The Gospel today, of course, is in John 13. And here is what we’re all called to do. Verses 34 and 35. “I give you a new commandment. By your love for one another, such as my love has been for you, so your love must be for one another. This is how all people will know that you are my disciples. Here. All people will know that we belong to Him because we’re people of love. That we reach out to others. That we become the instrument of God to other people.

God dwells in you and me by virtue of our baptism. Then what happens is when I reach out to somebody else, it’s Jesus himself reaching out to somebody else, and I can bring them into an intimacy with Christ, through me. You see, each of us is now called to be the very presence of God. And the Scriptures are very clear that God is what? Love. So what must happen then? If we can say God is love, then they must say that I am – love. That I am a person of love. That I am a person that will bring the presence of God to the world. And so if I start to reflect on that and I start thinking about that, am I truly a person of love to my family? Am I truly a person of love to the people I work with? Am I truly a person of love to the people I’m at school with? And again, to be a person of love doesn’t mean you’re a kind, gentle, la la. It means you’d lay down your life for them. Sometimes you’re gonna challenge them, and they’ll not like you maybe, huh? And sometimes they’ll love you. You know, at TEC last weekend (that’s why I wasn’t here, I was on TEC) one of the seniors came in, and Jim McCarthy was with me, and he sat there and he looked at him and he says, “tell me the truth. What do they think about Fr. Larry at Prep?” And the kid was about as honest as you could be. “Some people love him. Some people hate him. There is no in-between.” (Laughter.) True statement. That’s about as simple as it is. You could say the same thing about Jesus Christ. Some people loved Him. Some people hated Him. There was no in-between. Sometimes He challenged them. And they hated the challenge, and they wanted to kill Him for it. And sometimes He was gentle with them when they needed Him to be gentle. And usually the people He was the most gentle with were the people who were caught in sin and were sorry. But the people who were righteous thought, hey, I got it together, you don’t. I know what’s happening, you don’t. Boy, was He hard on them.

And we're called to be the same type. We're called to be Christ to the world by virtue of our baptism. No matter what we do, we're called to do it with love. To desire that everybody come to that intimacy with Jesus. That we use whatever tools available to us to love people. And to love somebody means you want them in Heaven someday. And so if you want them in Heaven someday, that means you've got to challenge them sometimes.

You know, again, I always feel my job as a priest, as a preacher, isn't to come here and tickle your ears every week. Wouldn't that be great? I could tickle your ears and you'd feel good after you leave me? And then you'd stand before God and you'd go to hell because the only thing I did was tickle your ears because I wanted you to love me. No. My job is to challenge you and me to become saints of God one day. No compromise. To be a saint of God means that you and I can stand before God one day and we will be with Him forever in Heaven. And that is the most loving thing you and I can ever do. To be that person of love who desires, who cajoles, who challenges other people to the intimacy of Jesus Christ. So that you and I can be together FOREVER in Heaven. That should be our goal.

Today, when we baptize Ryan Michael in just a very few moments now – why do we do this? So he can go to Heaven. He becomes a member of the Body of Christ, the church, today. That Community of Love which is eternal. The Community of Love which goes on and on and on. But what will Ryan Michael have to do in his life? Give it away a lot. Give away his life. Today is the ultimate giving away.

What would normally happen in a baptism is a person would go, and you know, it used to be full immersion. We don't want to immerse him – there's not enough water. What would happen is you would take them and you would immerse them. They would go into the water and you would hold them down three times – I baptize you in the name of the Father (person goes under the water), and of the Son (person goes down again) and of the Holy Spirit (person goes down for the third time). And then you lifted them up and they walked away from the other side to show that what has happened is you have died to an old life and now you live a new life.

And if you listen to the Gospel today, too, after Judas left Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man to be glorified." And how is He glorified? By giving away His life. And so that's a challenge. That's what love is. He says, the way I have loved you, I give up my life for you, now, that's what you got to do for each other. That means you got to love people if you don't like them. That means you've got to give up your life for them if you can't stand them. That means you love them if they hate you. That means you love them if they love you. That means you love them and are willing to give up your life for them. A challenge. And then Jesus says to us "this is the only way people will know you belong to me. If you love them as I have loved you. Is if you give up your life for them the way I gave up my life for you."

And so what Ryan Michael is being called today is the first of many times that he will give away his life. This is the first time. But every day of his life, beginning about in high school, he'll learn what life is about – it's about giving my life for others. That's what life's about. And in giving away my life for others, now I'm fulfilling the law of Jesus Christ. Love one another as I have loved you.

Do you and I do that? Ask the people who you love the most, and who you live with today. Tell them, please be honest with me. Do you think I love like Jesus? And then be ready for their reply. And if they say, well, you try. And they say it like that, then it's not good. And if they say, no way, then worry. But if they look at you and say, well some days you do it. Then that's a hope-filled sign. But no matter what they say to you, say that I want my goal to be from this day forward to surrender more and more to the God who dwells within me. To get caught up in the Community of Love. And then I want to more and more be a person of love to others. And to be a person of love means I give away my life for them and I challenge them to go to Heaven one day, because it's the most loving thing you could ever do, is to help be instruments for other people to go to Heaven.

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