

Father Larry Richards

Moderator, Bread of Life Community

December 23, 2001

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-14

Psalms 24:1-6

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24

First I have a confession to make. I've been preparing for this whole past week for the word "Emmanuel" for the homily for today and when I come walking in this morning and I saw "love," I almost had a heart attack, almost. Lucky you for some of you. Anyway today, I don't know what I'm going to talk about. We're going to go back. We gotta do Emmanuel because that's what I've been preparing for and that's what all the readings do. I don't know how this got all mixed. So, Emmanuel is what we're going to talk about.

Love and Emmanuel and all that's the same and have to do with each other. Emmanuel means "God with us." That 's what the first reading talked about and that's what the Gospel talks about. He shall be named Emmanuel. You know, yesterday as I was driving up to Cleveland, I listen to two radio stations, well three, that I have preset in my car. The first one is the Christian station, the second one is PRI and the third one when I listen to it every other month would be Classy 100 because I like to listen to Delilah, must mean I'm getting old. Anyway, yesterday I was listening to PRI and it has this one guy who was doing something on faith. And it talked about how in the middle of Texas this guy built a cross that's nine stories tall, 200 feet tall, and it's big steel and he wanted to do it and it cost him \$500,000. People come from all over and they're driving along the highway and they see this cross getting bigger and bigger and they stop and they pray and they're interviewing people. And at the bottom of the base of this cross it has statues of Jesus Christ and so it was this one girl they had interviewed and she had been away from God. She was in college and she was sitting there talking about, "You know, the last couple of weeks, life has been so meaningless for me. You know I'm the biggest 'partyer' in my school. I have parties, (and what she called them was bonfires), I would have four bonfires a week, sometimes more. Everybody would come around and we'd just sit there at the bonfire and everyone would get high and get drunk. And about three week ago, she says, is this what it is? She looked around at her friends and she says, "None of them want to grow up, they're not going to grow up. Is this what I want with my life? And then she started searching and when she got to this cross she stopped and she started to pray. And then she went to this one statue of Christ and when she went up and she touched that statue, and she touched His face especially, she was transformed because here, for her, Jesus was just not some otherworldly figure. He was human. He was one of us.

And see that's what God is as Emmanuel. That's what the readings talk about today, that the God of the universe becomes one of us. And He embraces us and it's this love that propels Him to come and be with us. You know, every one of us knows about love. I'm told all the time, Father, "We love you." We say to each other, "I love you." And it's all very nice but again love isn't real until it becomes enfleshed and enfleshed around us. For centuries we have heard from God, God saying, "I love you with an age-old love I have loved you," through the prophets, here is my covenant of love with you. I love you, I love you." And we go, "Oh very nice God. Ok, you do all this great stuff for us, nice." But we still need God in the flesh to feel that love. And so that's what God knew and so this God did not just talk about loving us, did not just say from on high, "I love you." But He came and He got inside of us and became this Emmanuel, this God enfleshed, so we could feel this love. We could touch this love. We could embrace this love; and this God of love, this Emmanuel does not only stay 2000 years ago, that's not what it's about. Ok, Jesus was alive 2000 years ago and every year we go through this play that we remember that ok Jesus isn't here and we're waiting for him to come back. No, no, no! Jesus was born then and then He says, "I am with you always." And then He says, "I am inside of you through Baptism." And so what does it mean for us, that we the people of Jesus Christ, the people of God, must be God enfleshed. We must be Emmanuel to each other and not that we take on this divinization, not that we become God. We're not talking about that garbage. We're talking about letting the God who was born 2000 years ago and was born in different times in each of our hearts. That we let this God truly take on my flesh and truly then be flesh to others. You see what that is, that I need to let God take on my flesh, to truly live inside of me. Not again pie in the sky when you die but today really right here with everybody I meet. That I let God take on my flesh, become Emmanuel within me, and then I become His presence to others. You see when we're talking about that journey of God to us, that journey of God to us goes through us to the world. That is how God touches the world, through us.

And so what is then my duty? My duty is to be the same as God was. And it talks about God is love. We hear it again and again, so I must be love. Not just talk about it. I need to enflesh it. And again, please, you've heard a thousand times, love isn't just la-la. Love is being willing to give up your life for other people. And this love in the flesh gotta be real. You know how I talk about Mary all the time. We forget that Mary was afraid at first when it was said she was to become the Mother of God. We want to make God this otherworldly, or the saints these otherworldly people with nice facial plastic faces. The nice statues that look like this-- No, all the saints farted. All the saints crapped. All the saints had to go to the bathroom. They had diarrhea. Can you imagine they had all that stuff? They had bad days and they had good days. Sometimes they were short with people. Sometimes they were very loving. But they were human beings and God enfleshed Himself through their humanity. And what needs to be real is that we gotta be real, real people who allow the God of the universe to work through me in spite of me. You got that? So that we can be. You know have our good days, have our bad days, sometimes smile, sometimes not. But that I want to with my whole being, bring Christ to other people. That's gotta be my desire. Sometimes you and I will do that great. Sometimes we'll do that miserably. But my desire still gotta be to bring this enfleshed God to others through my own humanity, Emmanuel. Is that my desire?

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