

Father Larry Richards

April 7, 2002
Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:42-47
Psalms 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

Good Morning! Today is Divine Mercy Sunday and I have up here the image that my Grandmother had - it's the oldest image I remember of Christ - and it was on her, on her wall. And I remember, as a kid, looking up and seeing this. And she cut it out of a magazine and she cut the "Jesus I Trust In You" out of another part, and she put it together. And I was lookin' for it after she died and it was behind some aluminum foil. My Grandmother put everything in aluminum foil. Don't ask why. The cups in the, in the, in the refri, uh, not the, but the cupboard were covered in aluminum foil so they wouldn't get dusty. There was 5 inches of dust on *top* of the aluminum foil, but at least there was ... (chuckle)... Ohhh, and she was a character. But today I thought it'd be appropriate - it's mercy - and it's all this stuff.

You know, in talking about mercy this past week, uh, when I was on vacation. I only went for a couple days and I forgot I didn't do my taxes. So, I locked myself up in my house; still not done with my taxes, but I got a lotta other work done I had to do. But, I was home, and this is not a good time, as you know, to be a priest. It's not a good time at all. In fact even when I was home, I sat there and my nieces and my nephew, I have two nieces and I have a nephew, and every year what I do for their birthdays is I take them out to dinner or to lunch and then I go and I give 'em fifty bucks or I give 'em I'll take them to the store and say, "Anything you want, let's buy it, I'll buy it for you, okay?" So this is the first year I did it without my clerics. Cuz I didn't want to take my little nephew out who's six years old and have people thinkin' that I'm a priest and here what am I doin' with this little kid. You know? And so it was the first time that I hadda sit there and start thinkin' about that kind of stuff.

If you watched ABC this past week, there was something on for an hour that was called, "Bless Me Father, For I have Sinned." And again, it was more about all the abuse and that that's been happening. And we have not dealt with that here in our Parish yet, because, I've always thought, well, again, you people know better. You know, about the type of priest you have. You know, by God's grace, I have been a good priest for 42 years. Not good in, good in celibacy ways, maybe not good in being the nicest guy in the world, but good in being celibate; and I know that most, most, 99% of the priests I know, throughout my life, have been good, good priests. And, so, sometimes when you hear all the garbage, you know, honestly, in the middle of the, thee uh, the "Bless Me Father, For I Have Sinned," one of my kids called me from Notre Dame and he's outside and he says, "Father, are you watchin' this?" And I says, "Oh, yes I am." And he says, "I just want to call you and thank you for being a good priest. And to know that we're behind you Father and we're supportin' ya and I been praying for you and all priests every day." And I said, "Well thanks. What a kid."

But then after that I had not said Mass yet. So I went downstairs to say Mass and to do my Holy Hour. And I was in the midst of the Holy Hour and right as I was gettin' ready for Mass I just started sobbing for the priesthood and for all the crap that's been happening in the priesthood. Because, when you listen to today's Gospel, what does Jesus say when he raises up the priesthood he gives these men of God? He says, "I give you the Holy Spirit. Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them." He gives them the Ministry of Mercy. And so that we and always throughout the 2000 years people of mercy. To give that in confession.

You know, about 8 years ago, Erie Times did an article on this type of stuff. I don't know if you remember it, but they did the article and the main priest they dealt with was me. And there was a big picture of me and it says, "Wolves in sheep's clothing or the other way?" And I thought, 'why have that picture of me up there?' But one of the things that they were talkin' about was, "Father, you do a lot with kids." And I have. My whole priesthood has been with kids. And the last seven years have been with all boys, huh, every day, seven years. And one of the things I've always done is never a kid under 18 has ever been allowed in my place. Ever. In 13 years of priesthood in two weeks I have never had a kid under 18 in my place alone. Maybe five of them or a group of them, but never under 18, all these years, ever in my place, just for this type of stuff.

But when I went downstairs, and I was praying about this, and I was crying, literally, about all the garbage. I said, "Lord, what are we to do? What do you want from us? What got to be our stand for the Judas' that are in our lives, the people who have betrayed your priesthood, the Holy Father said that have embraced the great mystery of evil. The priests who have done it have embraced evil. And I opened the Word of God. And as I opened the Word of God it just came to 1 Corinthians 13. You all know what 1 Corinthians 13 is don't you? Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not take offense. Love endures all things. When I was sittin' there in the midst of it, the Lord was sayin', "What you gotta do with everybody, instead of getting angry and nuts," like I have a habit of doin', "and instead of getting on the band wagon," this I too have a habit of doing, that what I gotta do is be a person of great mercy. And that's how we gotta deal with everything.

You know, I've been in Parma, how many, the last two years and did you just read yesterday in the paper how one of the priests in Parma committed suicide because he was accused at the St. Anthony's parish - 48 years old - not much older than me. All's he was was accused, and he couldn't take it and he went and put a gun to his head and went and killed himself.

This is a hard time in the church. But what we gotta do is be people that are strong in love. That never means, ever, that we okay when someone does something wrong. We give them mercy. And what's the definition of mercy? Doing something good for someone who doesn't deserve it. That's mercy. Doing something good for someone who doesn't deserve it. We need to be people, of all things especially today, people of mercy.

And as I was talking to my mother, my mother, you know, is a cop, or was, she's retired. And she was sitting there talking to me about the different places, you know, where they have pedophiles and that, then they have to deal with that reality. And you know, they have you have to get uh, what do you call it, some kind of uh, you get put on a list and everybody can know

where you're at. My mother, while she was a cop, had to deal with a bunch of people like this. And as she was dealing, the people were comin' and yellin' and screamin', "We don't want this guy in our area." And then my mother looked at them, and my mother is more judgmental than me, believe it or not; my mother sat there and looked at all these people that were yellin' and screamin' and she says, "You do realize, don't you, that pedophiles were abused themselves when they were kids. You know that, don't you, that this man was abused himself. And because he was abused, that's why he abuses. And what we gotta do is stop that reality." And so, then all the people, this crowd, my mother was tellin' me, got very quiet cuz they didn't realize that the person who was abusing had once been abused.

And so sometimes we neglect that reality. Should, if we find these people, throw them out of priesthood? Absolutely, positively, right away. Absolutely. What then should we do with them? Then we need to give them mercy. Look at the cross of Jesus Christ. Christ was killed. And yet He said, "Father, forgive them." So, whenever that, and I can tell you at this Diocese, we have been a Diocese, whenever there has been anything, that immediately in this Diocese they have been removed if it's ever happened. Immediately. Even if you know a couple years ago, one of the Monsignors, who is a Monsignor now, he was Headmaster down in Bradford, he was accused. They immediately took him out. His reputation was ruined. And after everything went through, the boy recounted, and then it was proved it was 100% false. And yet this poor guy, who is one of the holiest priests I know, will never because everyone will always kinda look at him and say, "Huh, ya right, he got away with it." But that isn't reality.

All's I can do is promise you, as your pastor, that we are people, and I am a priest who will always do what's best for your children. You don't have to worry about me and you don't have to worry about the priests in this Diocese. I can tell you that. And, if anybody was to happen, immediately they would be dealt, huh. So you gotta know that and you gotta know that you can trust the priests. That the ministry given to them in the Gospel today, "Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven," is a real thing. And that what we people gotta do is first of all receive mercy in our own lives. Every one of us here has something that we need mercy for. Every one of us. Every single one of us have went before a priest one day feeling very bad for your sins, and says, "Father, bless me for I have sinned. I am in need of mercy." And when that priest gave you mercy, you rejoiced in that reality. So after you and I receive mercy, especially today, then you and I need to be people who give mercy; who are people who always knows what it is to be a follower of Christ. We become people of love.

If you got a chance to watch that thing on Father, Forgive Me Father, For I Have Sinned, there was an ex-priest who did all that stuff and as soon as he was caught, he was the first one to say, "You've gotta get me out of priesthood. I don't deserve to be a priest." I had a lot of respect for that man, because he was right. But then he put himself into an exile. And he's been in exile outside of Cleveland now for the last seven, eight years or ten years, whatever it is. And in the midst of that, one thing that keeps haunting him, and I felt so bad; I was talking to a parishioner about it the other day, that keeps haunting him is that it would have been better if I was never born - The curse of Christ - than to lead one of the little ones astray. And I thought, you know what, that man needs mercy. He needs to know the mercy of God. He hasn't been around a high schooler or a kid in the last 10 years of his life. And he's put himself, but he still needs to know mercy. Would you be willing to give him mercy? Would you and I be willing to be people who

have received mercy, be people to give mercy. I just ask you as a community, as the community of Bread of Life, and soon to be merged with another parish (and I think it was announced today at that other parish, but I can't say anything), that you sit there and you become people who pray for the priesthood. Don't get on the bandwagon with everybody else and say, what's the matter with this one, why didn't they do that? -- there have been mistakes in the church. Terrible mistakes. And I think the biggest mistakes were when the Bishops and Cardinals tried to cover things up. But they did it, they thought they were doin' what was right. They were terribly wrong. But you and I gotta be people now that are willing for the mercy that the church has given us throughout our whole lives. The church has given us great mercy. We need to now give great mercy back to the church.

You got it? You get it? Good.

May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.