

February 4, 2007  
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Fr. Larry Richards

Good Morning! This will be the fifth time I am giving this homily, so hopefully we will get it right this time, huh? As we sit there and we listen to the readings today, the readings for today deal with, of course, three saints. It begins with the prophet, St. Isaiah, then Paul in the second reading – St. Paul, and then St. Peter in the gospel. And as we are dealing with the reality of these three saints – there are three things they hold in common with these readings today. And the same things that held them in common are the same three things that should hold us in common with them. The first thing is that each one of them had a humungous sense of their own unworthiness – they knew apart from God, they were nothing. We hear in the first reading Isaiah cry out “woe to me – woe to me for I am a man of unclean lips – I live amongst a people with unclean lips...” That means I am a sinner, if there are any questions. Here I am. This is “woe to me...” Then we get Paul, who says “I am the least of all of the apostles – I am the bottom of the barrel – I am nothing without God...” And then you have Peter that cries out “depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man...” And we need to be there with them. You will never be a great saint, unless you know that you are a great sinner. Let me say that again – You will never be a great saint, unless you know that you are a great sinner. A sinner who wants to do things your way – a sinner who wants to do things my way. That is the reality. And that is that subtle pride – that gets in there and robs us of our salvation, because we think compared to others, I’m darned good! Or, I do this, or I do that! But apart from Him, all three of these saints thought they were nothing! Who are you and me, to think that we are something, huh? You know, I did this past week – oh, the poor priests up in Syracuse. And again, I would talk to them the way I talk to anybody else, and I sat there and I started out with my first talk, of course and I said “oh, Fathers, I hope you don’t think you are doing God a favor because you are a priest.” And they looked at me like “boy, we aren’t going to like this guy at all!” But I sat there and I just reminded them that sometimes, we as priests think we are doing God a favor – you know, compared to everybody else – look at what I am doing for God – you know, say all these Masses, and you know, God isn’t impressed! And I love the album from the Christian singers – called Casting Crowns – and one of the lines in one of the songs is “it’s refreshing to know you don’t need me...” And that’s what I said, you know, sometimes we think God needs us. Let me give you a hint – God doesn’t need you and He doesn’t need me! Sometimes we think He does! But then the next line is “but it’s amazing to know that you want me...” God doesn’t need you or me – but He has called us. And when you and I come before Him and acknowledge who I am without Him – then He can do great things for me. And one of the ways that we can do this – basically – every day – throughout the day – is learn the Jesus prayer. I don’t know if you know the Jesus prayer – you should, it is very ancient – it has been taught almost from the beginning of Christianity – and it is the Jesus prayer that gets it’s reality from the parable about the Pharisee and the Publican. You know, the Pharisee comes before God in the temple and stands there upright, arms lifted high and says “thank you God...” oh isn’t he being nice and grateful? “Thank you, God that I am not like the rest of men! Look at everything I do for you – I tithe, I come to the temple every day – oh, thank you God!” And Jesus looks at him and He looks at us and

He says “he missed the point! He is not saved – he will not find it.” The He looks at the other poor sinner – the Publican in the back – who keeps his head down, doesn’t even dare to raise his eyes to heaven and strikes his breast and says “ have mercy on me a sinner, have mercy on me a sinner, have mercy on me a sinner.” Jesus, who is God, says “one walked away redeemed – the Publican – and one did not – the Pharisee.” Sometimes we are more the Pharisee than we are the Publican, and the way to deal with that is the Jesus prayer. The Jesus prayer is meant to be said throughout the day, all the time. You know, it tries to take the reality of praying always, and how do I do that. Well, the early mystics taught us, and they said the Jesus prayer, very simple. You breath in – “Lord Jesus Christ” – you breath out – “Son of the Living God” – you breath in “have mercy on me” you breath out “a sinner.” “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner – Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.” And so what happens is that we learn that as we breathe, we pray. “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner.” And when we do that, we are humbling ourselves. We are humbling ourselves and the word of God says “those who humble themselves shall be exalted and those who exalt themselves shall be humbled.” So, your decision– will you humble yourself before the Lord, or will you exalt yourself before the Lord? “Thank you Lord that I am not like the rest of these sleaze-buckets, huh?” Where are we before God, huh? That is where we begin! If we want to be with the saints, we have to be “have mercy on me, a sinner.” But we can’t just stay there – you know, some people stay there, you know? And they get this you know, “oh, I’m just no good, you know, why would anybody use me and why would anybody want me...?” And again, that’s self-pity so stop it! It has nothing to do with being a Christian. That self-turning in, and we stay there, because what happens is all three of the saints today and to us, the same thing – God doesn’t leave us there, because when we humble ourselves – now He exalts us! And the way He does it is He sends in Isaiah. He sends one of the Seraph angels – the Seraph is one of the highest all the angels that only deals with God. And He sends one of these Seraph angels from His throne and He reaches out and He touches Isaiah and He touches His lips and says “I have purified you. I have – not you – ME.” Then you get in the second reading and you get Paul. Paul says “by God’s grace I am what I am...” “By His grace I have done this – not by mine – but by His grace.” And then Jesus reaches out to Peter and says “Peter, don’t be afraid – you think you are doing great things with fish – I’m going to do great things for you for men...” That when God intervenes in our life when we humble ourselves, then God can do great things. But you have to be careful here, because some people think that it is because of their talents that God chooses us, right? And again, the same thing that I said to the priests – “Fathers don’t think you are going to do anything because of your talents.” If it’s just my talents, I’m not going to be able to do squat! But when I surrender it to the Lord I can do great things, huh? Again, in the second reading we hear today with Paul “by the grace of God, I am what I am and His grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than anybody! I have worked harder than anybody!” But then that next line is so great. “Not I, however, it’s the grace of God within me.” You know, some people say that Paul might have had a speech impediment. He might not have been a great speaker. But God used Paul to bring the world to conversion. Sometimes with us, we say “here, look what I did...” Here is what Peter does – Peter is a fisherman – that is his talent – he does it better than anybody! But now he has been fishing all night – doesn’t catch a fish! Jesus comes – some carpenter –

and the carpenter tries to tell the fisherman how to fish! He says “put out into the deep...” and Peter says – you can hear the frustration “oh Lord...” you know, you can almost hear it behind the lines... “Jesus, don’t tell me how to fish – I don’t tell you how to carpenter – don’t tell me how to fish. I know how to fish – I have been fishing all night – we are cleaning our nets already! It is done! But if you want me to – sure, we’ll try your way – ha, ha, ha!” And then he catches so many fish that it almost sinks two boats! This fisherman could no longer rely on his talent, but on the grace of God. If you and I are just focusing on our talents – then we are going to be filled with pride. “Oh, look what I do...” And then we go around telling the world what we do for God, instead of what God does for us – filling our pride! Filling ourselves instead of emptying ourselves and letting us be instruments of the grace of God, huh? And so we have to sit there and take ourselves and place them under God and let Him go beyond our talents with His grace and watch the fruit happen. But now the final thing happens that is necessary for all three of them and will be necessary for us – and that is a generous heart. And did you hear the first reading? Here is the God of the Universe looking right at Isaiah – you can see Him looking right at Him – and He is putting the question, like it is for anybody – and He says this question to Isaiah and He says the same thing to us – “Who shall go for us – whom shall I send...” as He is looking right at Isaiah. And you would think Isaiah would say “how about him, how about her? They’re good ones Lord, huh!? I already told you, I’m not much good! They have more talents than I do.” And that’s what we do when we are praying a lot of the time. God looks at you and says “whom should I send?” And you say “oh, that’s a good question, Lord, I’ll get back to you.” How about him, how about her, and He’s looking right at you! “Whom shall I send – who will go for us.” You and I have to be jumping up and down in the back of the class, waving our hands saying “here I am – hey Lord – send me – I want to go. Here I am Lord – send me.” When you and I do that – God can change the world, through us. We have to come before God to say “God, whatever you want me to be, I will be. God, whatever you want me to do, I will do. God, wherever you want me to go, I will go. Here I am – send me. I am not worthy, I don’t have the talents, but if you want me – I will do anything.” If you and I do that, great things will happen in your life – great things will happen in mine. We will help to change the world with the Lord Jesus Christ. And then one day, we too will be great saints, because we already know we are great sinners. But when we say “here I am – send me...” it is He who will transform us. Got it? Get it? Gonna do it? Good! May each of you know His love today and for ever – Amen.