

March 18, 2007

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Good afternoon. I love this gospel. That is why we were supposed to us Cycle A today, and I am sick Cycle A – we use Cycle A every year and I am sick of it! So, I said “we are staying with C” because I love the story of the Prodigal Son. It is something we all need to hear and listen to. And not always the way most people think about it – “I am the Prodigal son and I need to be coming back to God...” But that is not what I want to focus on. I want to focus on the word – the very first part of the thing that says “Jesus ate and drank with sinners.” And they hated Him for that. That God came to call sinners! And we have to be the same type of people. You know I have been gone the last two weeks on two different Missions and it is always funny to watch how people relate to me, huh? It’s just an interesting thing. The first week I was just outside Indianapolis – Westfield – and it is the biggest church in the state of Indiana and it held 1500 people – every night was packed. And you know, I got a call a couple of weeks before and they said “you know the pastor is pretty conservative...” and I said “what do you think I am? I’m a conservative...” And you know its funny – the daily Mass people are the ones that get mad at me. Me! Can you imagine? And I always say “listen, I am not here for the daily Mass people. You have a good pastor for that.” Same as last week when I went just outside of Chicago – the people that got so mad at me were the daily Mass people – the way I talked, the way I told my stories, and I would get up in front of everybody and say “I am not here for you – do you get that?” And they would be like “whoa, how dare you!” I was in Birmingham three weeks ago – I did the Men’s Conference – and again, someone wrote a letter to our Bishop on me – and it was “because Fr. Larry was this way...” and I said “listen, my job is to call the sinners,” and I feel that is my main job here too, is to reach out to the sinners. Now, if we know who we are, we know that means all of us – even the daily Mass goes. But some people think that they are righteous – that I’m not that Prodigal son. I would never stoop and eat and drink with the sinners! And some people get so religious that they are no longer like Jesus Christ! Here is the king of kings and the lord of lords, and when He came to earth – He was at the bars. Can you imagine? People would be scandalized! He went and drank and ate with the sinners! He hung out with these people – and not to become like them, but to save them! And see, in all of our hearts, we have to have that hunger and that yearning of the Prodigal father, who the only thing he wants is to reach out and bring the son home. We can’t be sitting there and being judgmental of the world! You know some people sit there and look at the world and say, “oh, look at those people, Father, do you think Christ is going to come again, because everything is bad.” And I say “no, Christ leaves everybody around here because why... because He wants everybody to be saved.” Do you and I want everybody to be saved? And if the answer is “yes Father” – then what are you doing about it? What are you and I doing to reach out to the pagans? To reach out to the sinners? To reach out to the prostitutes? To reach out to the people that nobody else wants anything to do with because we are a righteous church, huh? What are we doing? You all know the story – I have told it to you throughout the years – it is the end of time – the final judgment. And as everybody is standing there the angel of God comes and here is the righteous people that did everything good all their lives – you know “I was a great, great, follower of

Jesus...” And then he had the sinners. Now, the sinners know they are going to hell. And the angel comes – and the righteous know they are going to heaven, because they have already been saved – God owes them! And so, the angels come and they start whispering through the crowd “God in His mercy is going to let everybody come to heaven. He is going to open the doors – it doesn’t matter, His Son paid the price for everybody. Everybody gets to come home.” Then all the righteous people start yelling “but I denied myself all of my life – I did this for God, and I did this for God!” And the righteous are instantly damned, and the sinners go to heaven. Where are we? Are we the righteous, or are we the sinners? Are we here to save the world – as many people as possible? Or are we here to look good – to be stained glass – things that people look at, so people can say “aren’t they perfect, those stained glass windows?” Are we like the stained glass windows, or one of these statues here? “Don’t they look beautiful?” Stained glass window people – statue saints people? Or are we people that struggle and we have only one desire – that we are the prodigal father too. And we want to reach out to everybody – to bring them home. As long as one person doesn’t know Christ – our job isn’t even complete – not even begun to be complete. We have to have that desire inside of us that God has – that He wants every single person to be saved. That’s God’s heart – He wants you to be saved, and He died to save you and me. He who knew no sin became sin to save you and me. Do we have that same heart this Lent? And if we say “yes, Father” then practically, what are we doing about it? How are you – how am I – reaching out to the lost to bring them home? You know, and again, someone asked me this past week “Father, don’t you feel guilty that you leave your parish to come and do this stuff?” And I said “no...” and they say “oh, you don’t love your parish?” “Oh, I love my parish. But someone else did something like that once – His name was Christ, huh.” Remember the story about the lost sheep? He left the 99 to do what...to find the one. So, I know the 99 do fine without me – yins are holier than me, as you know, that’s what most of you talk about. But my job is to bring everybody to Christ, and that is your job too. And when we are all on the same page about this – our job is to have the heart of God and to bring everybody home – then we will all get excited and start doing whatever the Lord calls us to do. Then we will be like the prodigal father. So, today the Lord calls you and today the Lord calls me to be like Him, and to invite the people who don’t know Him home. May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.