

March 29, 2009

5th Sunday of Lent - Cycle B

Today we focus on the Gospel year B in John's Gospel. And it begins with the Greeks. And the Greeks come and they ask Jesus, they asked the disciples of Jesus a question. What is the question? "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Thank you for paying attention. "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." And they ask the disciples that. Now, again, that is the question of everybody that they ask you and me. "Sir or mam, I would or we would like to see Jesus." That is the key. You see, what happens so often is we just go through the motions of being Catholics or Christians, whatever. But to be a Christian by definition as I said a billion times throughout these years is to be another Christ. So again, our job is to bring and to show people Jesus Christ. To die so much, that He increases, I decrease. When people look at me and when they look at you they just get to know Jesus Christ.

When we were at a mission this past week, we have 1500 people every night, even the night of the passion. Every night there is a standing room. And they are standing around and I say, "You know, if you came here just to know Father Larry Richards, ask my parishioners that will just get you to hell. The reality is you have to get to know Jesus Christ. You have to get to know the truth because that is all that matters. And my job is to reveal to you and share with you the truth of the Gospel, not the truth of Father Larry Richards. Now hopefully when I share the truth of Father Larry Richards it is a reflection of the Gospel." And so with us, it must be a reflection. Our lives must be this reflection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But the only way we can do that is to get out of the way and let people see Him.

Now that is the question. How do we show them Jesus Christ and not ourselves? Well, it is pretty simple. The Second Reading today, which you did not hear, but the Second Reading from year B talks about what Jesus did and it says, "He offered prayers and supplications." Jesus who is God, it has been recorded many; many times that He went and spent the night in prayer. He went before He raised Lazarus from the dead, literally, He went and He prayed. He talked to His Father. And so the reality is to know Jesus Christ and to show people Jesus Christ, the first thing we have to show them, is that we are people of prayer. It is very simple. We have to be able to show people that we are people of prayer.

Again, in Virginia Beach there was in this church there, St. Gregory the Great, they have over 13,000 people, individuals on their roles. 4,500 families; humungous parish. But, though they have that many people guess what they don't have? Perpetual Adoration. So, I can't put up with that so I got up and I say, "Listen, are you kidding me? How could you not have Perpetual Adoration?" You know the priests always love me when I come in and do these things. But I said to them, "If you are in love with Jesus, don't you want to be with Jesus? And if you want to be with Him, isn't that the way you prove it?" See again, we could all sit there and play these games with people and say oh I love Jesus. I love Jesus. Well, that is nice. I don't buy it unless you prove it. And you prove that you love Jesus by what? Spending time with Him. You can't sit there and tell me you love your wife and you never talk to your wife except for 45 minutes a week. I am saying you are a liar. Yep, that is what I am saying. Father, that is not nice. I really don't care. If you love Jesus Christ, you spend time with Him. That is what prayer is.

So can you prove, can you and I show people that we are in love with Jesus because we spend time with Him? Can people see that? Now some people sit there and say, "Well, I don't want people to see it." Well, Jesus let people see it, didn't He? He went and He left them to go pray. He was a person and people knew He was praying. And so again, people must know we are praying. It is a good thing. Now for some of you, you have a lot of kids here. There is a lot more kids in our last Mass. But anyway again, like a couple of years ago when I was with the priest who sat there and talked about his mother and his mother had four boys. Could you imagine? And she would wake up at 2:00AM every night and spend a holy hour with God in front of the icon of the Blessed Mother. Every night she would do that because she wanted to make sure. And what an example she was to her children who saw her, was a woman of God and knew that she did that.

So do your children see that you are a man or woman of prayer? Does your husband or wife see that you are a man or a woman of prayer? Do your parents see that you are a child of prayer? Do your co-workers see that you are a person of prayer? When you go to eat out at dinner or whatever, do they see you bow your head and communicate with the God of the Universe? Are you showing people that you are a follower of God and you are not ashamed of Him because they see you pray? First thing. The apostles saw Jesus pray. So must you and I, people must see us pray.

Second thing that happens, is Jesus, in the Gospel today we hear the reading of, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat." Now when we started our TEC retreat program, about 12 years ago now, again, that is the whole Die Day. The first day of our retreat is Friday. It is called Die Day. And this Gospel is what leads us through the day. And I sit there, and the point of it is... listen, the only way to experience the resurrection is to die. And I sit there and so what I am doing, I will be doing one in a couple of weeks here, I will sit there and say, "Listen, my job here this weekend is to kill you. Are you excited?" And the people on Friday are like, "Oh he is really a weird priest." And I get that a lot you know. But anyway, but my job is to kill you. It is so you will die with Jesus. There is no way to experience Christ's resurrection unless you experience His crucifixion with Him. That means to be very simple about it that we lay down our life every day. And people see that we are laying down our lives.

And the way we do that is first of all we are people of generosity. You know to me, one of the sure signs of a follower of Jesus Christ is a person of generosity. Not just generosity of their money, even though that is part of it, money should be the easiest thing we are generous with but also generous with our time, generous with our energy, generous with God, we are generous with others. And again the way we make that real is for you and I every day before we go to bed to do that examination which I have talked about before. Do you and I every day before we go to bed examine our lives and think; did I commit one unselfish act today? Just one. Did I commit one unselfish act today? That means, did I lay down my life for somebody else, not in regard of what happened to me? Did I lay down my life? And if the answer is no, then I wasted my day on myself. I didn't show Jesus to anybody. I only showed me to people because the whole thing today is I lived for me. I didn't do one unselfish act for my wife, for my husband, for my children, for my co-workers, for the people on the street, for the poor. I lived today only for me. So the second way we show people Jesus is by a life of sacrifice, generosity, giving away our life every day.

The third way we show people Jesus and not ourselves is that Jesus, like He says, "Now is the time for My Father to be glorified and I need to be glorified." And He says in the Gospel today, He says, "What should I say, Father save Me from this hour? No. This was the reason I came." And so we must be people who are going to show people Christ, we must be people who only have one goal in life, to do the will of the Father. So that means I exist to do God's will. Not mine. Not anybody else's. I exist to do the will of God the Father. Is that why you and I exist? Is that our vision? Is that our goal? That I want to do what God does. What God wants me to do? So when I stand before Him on Judgment I hear, "Well done good and faithful servant, you did as I commanded. You didn't do as you wanted. You did as I commanded." See that's what has got to happen. The purpose of it all of course, more persons of prayer, more persons of self-sacrifice and generosity, more persons who only live to do the will of the Father, we are then transformed in to who? Jesus Christ. So now we are showing Jesus to the world. And ultimately, that is what matters. Sir, ma'am, we would like to see Jesus. Do we show people Jesus or do we show them ourselves? May each of you know his love today and forever, amen.