

Easter Vigil

April 3, 2010

Fr. Larry Richards

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christ is risen indeed! Tonight finally Lent is over. One of many, many, many, many reasons as many of you can tell, I will never be a Bishop is because I don't like the ritual. The more things we add on the more I think oh no! You know we could have read seven readings tonight but we cut it down to three. There are all of these things we have got to do and do well and I don't do things that well. My big thing is it isn't about the ritual, it is about the person. The person of Jesus Christ and He is alive. What we need to do this Easter Season is make sure we enter into this relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ who isn't dead, who is risen.

The whole thing about our TEC retreats when we have one is it is based on the Paschal Mystery. And the main talk of the TEC weekend is on the Paschal Mystery. The Paschal Mystery is the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But if that is all it is, we are looking at it from afar, oh we believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, then it is going to drive us insane. It is going to be just like a story we that we like or we don't like. But that is not what it is. When we preach the Paschal Mystery, we talk about the suffering, life and death of Jesus and how we participate in that reality. How the Lord is calling us to this life giving life with Him.

So how do you think, and these new people who are going to be brought into the church, one thing you are all going to get tonight, what is that? Do you know? Begins with a "c" and ends with an "n"? Communion, no, you are going to get that too. Confirmation, whew, thank you. And what happens when you get confirmed? What is going to happen here people? The Holy Spirit is going to come upon you, people. You see the way all of us enter into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ is through the Holy Spirit. So it is not a ritual, it is a person. What we really need to do is surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit tonight. These people who are about to be confirmed tonight, yes, but all of us. You know I love the letter from Timothy when Paul is looking at Timothy and he is reminding Timothy who is a bishop and a priest. And I love this because sometimes we all have to remember this. That we don't all have it together even the bishops and priests, we don't have it all together. So Paul is reminding this bishop, Timothy, "Timothy may I remind you to stir into the flame the gift that was given you, the spirit that was given to you when we laid our hands upon you." So I want to remind all of you of that same thing tonight. Those of you who have already been confirmed you have a gift. Now is the time to surrender to it, to fan it into a flame. To fully surrender so you can fully start living the life of Christ.

Then he says, "The Spirit that God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but one that makes us strong, loving and wise." What is going to happen to these people who are confirmed tonight?

We are not just going to give you something and say be sealed with the Holy Spirit and you are going to say amen and we are going to pray. Uh uh. We are going to set you on fire. Are you excited? Don't worry some of you we are going to get wet first. Then after we get you wet up here and kill you, that is what we do, we kill you tonight aren't you excited. You are going to be dead. We are going to kill you and after we kill you we are going to raise you to new life and after we raise you to new life we are going to set you on fire. Then what has to happen for all of us is the same exact thing. That we all have been at this baptismal font. We all have been baptized, or most of us here. We all have been given the gift. We died with Christ and we rose with Jesus. And then the gift was given to us that most people don't use.

You know I am a spiritual director for Seminarians. I told the Seminarians and this is what I am going to do with you this year. I said to them, "We as a Catholic Church love Lent don't we? Well let me suffer some more. Oh the things I give for Jesus. And then some people kind of hate when Lent is over because they love the suffering part. Have fun! I love when Lent is over. I don't enjoy it much. Now you do realize that some people like to get stuck there. Jesus did not like suffering on the cross did He? He couldn't wait until it was over and then He rose from the dead. Three hours of suffering; twenty-four hours of suffering; but now Christ is alive. So what must happen is you and me is to get over this and not stay there. You and I are called to be alive in Jesus. So I told my seminarians, those I am doing spiritual direction for I said, "Listen, just as much intensity that you put into your Lent, I am going to do this, I am going to deny myself this and I am going to do this, I want you to do something with as much intensity what you are going to do for Easter. Is there more days to Lent or more days to Easter? Easter. We are a resurrection people but how come we focus so much on Lent. How come we will do all of these things and then when it comes to Easter we have a big time here. We get all excited. We do the ritual and then we go ahead and do nothing for the rest of our Easter Season. I want to give the same challenge to you. I want you to start surrendering yourself to the Spirit everyday and start living a fullness of life in Christ. Christ is risen up there, sure in the tabernacle, yes, but where is Christ risen most? In us, right? That is what we believe. And the way that He rises in us is through the power of the Holy Spirit. So the first thing I want to encourage you this Easter is if you haven't started yet, you have this daily surrender to the Holy Spirit. You give permission to the Holy Spirit to set you on fire today and everyday of your life. That is where you start. But then what I would encourage you to do through this Easter season is one of three things or do three things.

The first is as the Apostles did, spend time everyday with the resurrected Lord. Not the crucified Lord. What I am talking about with the resurrected Lord is maybe those of you who say the rosary, maybe everyday for Easter you say the Glorious Mysteries, everyday to help you remember that this is what God is calling us to. Not staying focused on the past. Jesus was dead on the cross now He is alive so let us focus on that. You don't have to. I am just giving this to you as a suggestion. Maybe you say the Glorious Mysteries every day. Maybe you spend extra time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament because let me give you a hint, Christ isn't dead in that tabernacle. He is alive. And the two people on the road to Emmaus the way they came to

recognize Him was how? In the breaking of the bread. So they spent time with Jesus in the Eucharist. That is how they came to know He was alive. Do you know that Jesus Christ is alive? If you don't know it in your heart of hearts, if you don't really know that Christ is alive I would challenge you, you come and spend five minutes every day in front of this church, in the adoration chapel, you spend five minutes a day, if you don't know if Christ is alive you start spending time with Him in His Eucharistic presence and you say, "Jesus if you are alive I want to know you." And I promise you will come to know Christ isn't dead. He is alive. At seventeen I would sit in the Church of the Epiphany in downtown Pittsburgh and I would say right before the Blessed Sacrament, "God are You alive or aren't You alive? Do You care, don't You care?" And one day after six months of spending six months with Him I came to know that He was alive. I remember kneeling there in front of Him and saying, "Jesus I will do anything You want. You tell me what You want. I will do anything You want." And at seventeen years old He said, "I want you to be a priest." I said, "Okay." No one would recommend me. My pastor thought I was a nut and I am. My father thought I was wasting my life. Maybe, but I knew it. I knew Christ was alive and I knew I would do anything He wanted. So do you want to know Christ is alive? It is amazing how many people say, "You know, I don't even know if God exists." Do you spend any time with God? Those of you who are married, how did you get married? You spent time with them and then you fell in love. If you want to know that Christ is real you must spend time with Him. You just can't sit at home and sit on your butt watching television and say well I haven't experienced anything. Well excuse me. You haven't done anything either. Jesus is waiting for you. Will you sit there, if you don't know Him will you do what it takes to get to know Him in His resurrected form?

Another thing that Jesus did and the Apostles did, they spent time with each other. Remember after the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles after they started living this resurrected life they dedicated themselves to the breaking of the bread, to the teaching of the Apostles, to the communal life and to prayer. Do things with others. Maybe that will be one of your challenges that everyday just like you would say okay I am going to give up Pepsi for Lent. OOOHHH! Say everyday that I am going to spend time with the resurrected Christ. Say everyday that I am going to go out of my way to make contact with friends and spend time with friends every day." Say every day, "Well maybe what I will do is because I am a temple of the Holy Spirit that I will sit there I and I love and what is the first thing that Jesus did after the resurrection when He was trying to prove he was alive. Do you know? I hope this isn't the case with us after we are resurrected. But what is the first thing Jesus did? He ate fish. Hopefully they've got more than fish in heaven. But Christ ate to prove He was physical. You know we don't believe when you resurrect we are not angels are we? You get your resurrected body back. Aren't you excited? But they are glorified body but after the resurrection Jesus Christ still age. Sometimes if you decide okay if you give up something extra for Lent, joyful. Why don't you everyday have a piece of something you love to share in the resurrection. To show that you are the body of Christ, that Christ lives within you. So everyday if you would like a piece of candy, don't eat a box that will be bad. But do one piece and rejoice in it. And thank the Lord in it. Rejoice in being alive instead of being constantly focused on what is we are doing wrong and being constantly

focused on how life stinks. Go for it. Let's focus on that every day I share in the resurrection of Jesus and one day I will share in the fullness of that.

The Church on purpose makes us spend more time in the resurrection but for whatever reason we have not adopted those practices. Let's today be the day that we change and that we live this resurrection every day this Easter season. You got it? Get it? Gonna do it? You will enjoy it if you do. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.