

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 31st, 2010

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. This First Reading today was in the Office of Readings this past week. I was reading it for my daily prayer. I was thought, "This is such a powerful reading. Again I don't think most people pay any attention half of the time to the Readings. In case you didn't, listen to what it just begins with. It says, "Before the Lord the whole universe is a grain from a balance where a drop of morning dew..." So the whole universe, think about how much we know about the whole universe. The whole universe is just a grain before God. And yet this awesome, almighty, powerful, glorious, unbelievable, all powerful God, "this God," it goes on to say, "but you have mercy on all." That this God is a merciful God. "For you love all things and you hate nothing that You have made." That God loves all things and He hates nothing that He has made. How unlike God we are. There are things in our lives that we hate. There are people that are different than us that we hate. We hate the people who don't see things our way. We hate them, we loathe them. We go to Confession and say, "I know I am not supposed to hate people but I cannot stand these type people." Or we are biased or judgmental or we are bigoted, whatever it is, fill in the blank. And all of those things that we are, God is not. The awesome, powerful God loves everything that He has made and hates nothing that He has made. And if God hates nothing that He has made than neither can we.

Now there is something that the Word of God says God hates and what is that? Sin, but He doesn't hate the sinner and He proves that today with Zacchaeus, correct? Here, the God of the universe who hates the sin of all things because it put God, the Son on the Cross, but He loves the sinner. He goes out of His way as the God of the Universe to now separate Himself from sinners, to not hold Himself aloof from sinners but to go and have table fellowship with sinners; to go and be at the home of a great sinner. When the God of love reaches out to Zacchaeus it is His love that transforms Zacchaeus.

This past weekend I did a retreat the last two days in Greensburg. It reminded me when I was hearing confessions Friday with all of these guys and usually the guys when they finally get to make good confessions, and hopefully that is what we normally do when I get guys to go to confession after a good examination of conscience, it reminded me of years ago when someone came to confession and he confessed something horrible. The man started to sob and he says, "Father, will God forgive me?" He kept just asking me again and again crying, "Father, will God forgive me? Will God forgive me?" "I don't think He will forgive me." "Father, do you think God will forgive me?" And all I could keep saying was, "Excuse me, look at the cross. The cross, that is why God will forgive you. You don't think that one drop of the blood of Jesus on the cross is enough to forgive that sin which is very horrible, I agree, but don't you think that the blood of Christ is enough?" It is more powerful than any sin you and I may have ever committed. And God with that man years ago, God with us when we go, God does not hate us. God is not out to get us. God loves everything He has created. You and me when we fall, the God of the universe is there. He hates our sin but He loves us.

That is why that First Reading it keeps saying, “He keeps doing everything to get us to repent. So what the call then of God is here in the Scriptures is that He loves you and He keeps calling you to come and repent, to come home. He gives you that choice. He won’t force you home. He won’t force you to repent. He won’t do anything but love you and say, “Come here, let Me forgive you.” That is what He wants to do. And that is what you and I have got to let Him do for us. We have got to develop the attitude that no matter what that God loves me. That He loves everything He created. And if I have that attitude that God loves me and He loves everything that He created then I can have that attitude with other people – that God loves you and everything He created. You should go home and put it on a block – there is nothing that God hates. Nothing that God hates. So it there is nothing that God hates except for sin, who are you and I to ever hate anything? That is the point.

We can be big haters. I can be a very big hater, you know very judgmental; do all of these things. And sometimes I just need a kick in the butt from Almighty God and say, “Excuse me!” Like when I was praying the other day, “Larry I don’t hate anything. Why do you?” “I don’t know God. It is just part of the reality.” But if He hates nothing then neither can you or I. He hates sin so we can hate sin. But the problem with us is we usually hate the sinner too. People say, “Well you know Father I know I am supposed to hate the sin but love the sinner, but it is hard.” Yes it is, but that is what God does. Think about the way how we relate to other people – do we separate ourselves from people because they are sinners? Or do we embrace the sinners? In the front of our website it says, “God loves everybody and everyone is welcome to the Father’s house.

Last year someone from California wrote to me and they said, “Father, just to let you know I am moving back to Erie, PA and I am bringing my lover with me. We are a gay couple. We have been married for a long, long time. Would we be accepted in your church?” And what was my answer? “Yes, of course you are accepted in our church. Absolutely, positively. But though you are accepted in our church you will be called to repentance like everybody else.” That is the thing – do you and I, would we accept anybody? Would we accept a murderer here; a rapist here; a person who has committed incest? Would we accept everybody into our church? If not we are not like God. If not we are not following God. When we bring them into our church and accept them, then we do what Jesus did with Zacchaeus. And it is the love of God that changed Zacchaeus. It wasn’t the judgment of God that changed Zacchaeus.

So are we ones who are judgment will change people? Because it will not. God did not leave Zacchaeus in his sin, he changed his sin into mercy. God will not leave you and me in our sin. That is not the point. We don’t accept sin, that is not the point. But the way we get people to stop sinning is we love them through it and then love sets them free not our judgment. That is the key of all Christianity that the love of God sets people free. And so it must be that way when we deal with people. It is the love of God inside of us that will set people free not our judgment of them. So what is my attitude towards sinners? How do I welcome them or not welcome them? How do I treat people that don’t agree with me? Let us look at Jesus, let us look at God the Father and let us imitate them. You got it? Get it? Going to do it? Let’s try. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.