

Third Sunday of Advent – Cycle A

December 12, 2010

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. My last talk was on Friday and I didn't realize that. They told me it was on Saturday. So I called Delta because I figured even though the weather was 70 degrees and the sun was out. Fr. Detisch and I were on Bourbon Street Friday night which we won't go to, but we had a phenomenal time. But I wanted to get back for Mass if I had a chance. So I called Delta and I said, "How much would it cost me to get back a day early?" They said, "Twenty-four dollars." "Okay." I get back last night. Poor Fr. Steve was looking forward to saying this Mass. But we are back because I try to be here as much as possible on Sunday. As I was there it was quite an interesting group. We had twenty-five hundred people in the convention center from all around the United States for this young people's convention. I was the keynote speaker in the midst of Mass on Friday morning. You know my style is always the same no matter where I go whether it is here, whether it is there, wherever. One of the people who got me down there to speak he says, "Father that was excellent. It was unbelievable. It is just what they needed but you know they are never going to ask you back." I said, "That is fine with me. If that is the way they want to see it and they don't want to be challenged to the next level then fine." I think most people really just want their ears to be tickled. They just want me to tell them how good they are because I am a minister and I said, "You know the guy before me was head of all of the ministers and all of youth ministry in the United States he got up and spoke about how we are all saints." So the very first thing I said when I got up to say Mass was, "People of God we are not all saints. We are in process. So we need to repent." Everybody looked at me like, here we go.

But this is what God is saying to us in the readings. You know every week even when He loves us, even when He tells us He is challenging us to the next level. We must do that. We must be people that are open to that. You know when John the Baptist asks Jesus, "Are you the one to come or is there another?" the very last line Jesus responds to him, not the last line of the Gospel, but his answer back to John the Baptist was what? "Happy are those that find no offense in Me." Ed, I think is the only one that listens to the Gospel around here. Anyway, "Happy are those who find no offense in Me." He is saying if you are open to where I want to take you, if you are open to the newness, blessed are you. If you are not offended by what I am telling you; if you are offended because I am calling you to the next level; if you are not offended because I am giving you life. That is what He is saying. Blessed are those who are not offended.

Yet you listen to the Second Reading and it goes on. Stop complaining about one another. It says, "Do not complain brothers and sisters about one another that you may not be judged." Now I am a big complainer. Anybody else here a big complainer? "Oh no Father, none of us are big complainers." Hmmm....we need to know ourselves. But then none of that is what I want to focus on today. It is always my little aside. But I do want to focus on the First Reading. It says, "Be strong, fear not. Here is your God" And then what does it say, "He comes with vindication, with divine recompense. He comes to save

you.” And then He says, “The eyes of the blind will be open. The ears of the deaf will be clean. The lame will leap like a stag. The tongue that was mute will sing.” When we come to meet and encounter God what He brings us is healing. The same thing we hear in the Gospel. “Go tell John what you hear and see. The blind will regain their sight and the lame will walk; lepers are cleansed; the deaf do hear and the dead will be raised and the poor will have the Good News proclaimed to them.” You see we need to have a desire and want to be with Jesus Christ. I mean that is the whole point, right?

You know we had down there 2,500 people and there was an Adoration Chapel, a big chapel bigger than this church. Big Chapel. The had a big maze you could walk through. Not a maze but what do you call those things? New Age stuff. A Labyrinth. So you could take off your shoes and do you Labyrinth. There is all this stuff and then there is the God of the Universe there exposed in front of the Blessed Sacrament. There were 2,500 people there and they had 24 chairs. I went in there throughout the day, many times throughout the day and never was more than half of them filled. I am thinking there 2,500 ministers of Jesus Christ in this building and Christ waits for us to be with Him. He wants to heal us. He wants to love us. He wants to give everything to us and we are all very busy about many things that we just can't sit and be with the Lord. So when I had my second talk, it was a professional workshop, and so again it was packed, they had to open two rooms, standing room only. They put a note on the door saying they cannot let anybody else in here. We had about 800, 900 people in this room. I got up and I said, “People of God”, my talk was bringing kids to knowledge of Jesus, I said, “we are all ministers of Jesus. We can't bring anyone to Jesus unless we know Jesus. And we can't know Jesus unless we spend time with Him. People of God Jesus Christ is downstairs. He is waiting there. There are 2,500 people here. We are His ministers and none of us are stopping in to be with Him. Please,” I screamed, “Don't you dare walk passed Him without going in and saying “hi.” What is the problem?”

But then we do the same thing here don't we? I am not judging those people. I am just saying this is the way it is. Here for three weeks now, three weeks I have asked to have someone fill the 2AM hour in front of the Blessed Sacrament on Sunday nights. Three weeks, at all of the Masses, at the church of St. Joseph Church, Bread of Life Community, three weeks and everyone has ignored it again, and again, and again and again. “Not me. “ And what will happen is someone who has four hours after this Mass they will say, “Okay Father, I will add another hour.” Oh no you won't! Not as long as some miserable, selfish, human beings won't even give an hour of their life to God you are not going to give another hour. We don't get it. When you and I come into the presence of Almighty God we get healed. Our needs get met. When we come before Him all of those things He talks about in the First and Second Readings He will give to us if we want to be with Him. If when we come into His presence it is not about me. What am I going to get? Give me, give me, give me. If I come into His presence and say, “Lord I just want to be with You,” healing comes automatically. The problem is it is always give me, give me, give me. I desire. Some of you are thinking, “I wish you would have stayed down there another day Father. I really don't like when you come back.” I know what you are thinking. Sorry.

I think I told you not to long ago but when I was a newly ordained priest, nobody knew who I was. I was only ordained a year and a half and I got another one of my hate mail letters. I have a whole collection. The whole bottom of my drawer is all hate mail from the last 22 years of why I am no good. I agree, I know. Sorry. So it was one of those days where I am having a horrendous day. The only time during my

priesthood from the beginning, I thought I was going to leave the priesthood. And the reason I was going to leave the priesthood because I didn't want to give scandal to Christ or give Him a bad name, or turn people off to Him. So it was my day off on Friday and I was home in Pittsburgh. I will never forget I was a mess. I am going back and forth and thought I am going over to be with Jesus in Steubenville. And at Steubenville of course they have the port. And at the port they have 24-hour Perpetual Adoration. So I was there Friday night about 1 o'clock in the morning when I got there. And the port is not very big. It may be as wide as one of these center pews or maybe even shorter than that. I knelt in the very last pew, very back pew on the right hand side at the end. There were 5 or 6 people there and I just put my head down and I am really crying out to God and saying, "God, if you want me to leave the priesthood then I will leave the priesthood. Lord if I am not being the instrument you want me to be; Lord if I am leading people astray; Lord if because of my personality whatever it happens to be."

Again when I was thrown out of seminary, Fr. Larry Speice who was our vocation director at the time looked at me and said, "Larry it is like this. You have a cancer. It is your personality. You would never be a good priest." And here I was refocusing on that reality of my cancer, of my personality. I would never be a good priest. I remember just crying out to God, "Maybe God I should leave. If I do that I will do whatever You want. Then at 1:30 in the middle of the night I laid my head down, whoever it was, I have no idea even to this day, I hear someone from behind me and someone comes up and puts their hands on my shoulders, this boy puts his hands on my shoulders and he whispers into my ears and my eyes are closed and he says, "Father, thank you for being a priest. We need you." And then he left. God knew my deepest need that night. In the middle of the night when I ran to Him, to be with Him in the middle of the night, the Lord, the God of the Universe met my need there and brought me healing, a healing which has lasted over twenty years. When you and I come before the Lord and we come to be with Him, and we run to Him. And there He is waiting for us. He is always there to heal us, to love us, to embrace us, to fulfill all our needs.

You know some of us think that we are doing Him a favor when we do a Holy Hour. "I am doing you a favor God. You know I am very busy in my life but here I through the audacity of my humility will come and work it into my busy, busy, busy schedule. I will come and I will be here and You should be grateful to me Almighty God." Really? When you and I take time out of our lives to be with Him, He only brings us healing. Even if that healing means He kicks our butt from side to the other but that is beside the point. He does what we need because we want to be with Him. So, please, let us examine our lives as if we are begging Him to come this Christmas season. We are begging Him and saying, "Jesus, I yearn for you to come as my Savior born this Christmas Day" in a couple of weeks. It doesn't matter if we just want Him to come for Christmas. If we just don't want to be with Him every day of our lives, if our time with Jesus isn't just more than just once a week because I have to so I don't go to hell, when you and I come to be with Him He gives us His life. He gives us His healing. He gives us His presence and what is more important than that? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.