Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 20, 2011

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. I can’t get over whatever I have had this past month. So you have got to keep praying for me. I have bursting blood vessels in my eyes. I have all this pink stuff in my eyes so it has kind of been like disgusting. I almost cancelled going to Charlotte. I was in bed at 7 o’clock on Thursday night with a fever. I was saying the Divine Mercy Chaplet throughout the night. I said, “Lord if you want me to get to there, You are going to have to get me there.” He broke my fever and I got there. I got sick when I got there and now I am sick again. I have to go tomorrow at 6AM to Long Island and preach there. Then I am off Friday to Collegeville Minnesota and preach there. So I am asking for your prayers that the Lord gives me strength that this is what He wants. If not then He can just knock me down and put me in bed for a week and I can handle that too.

But today, we need to focus on the Word of God. All three of the readings deal with holiness. Be holy is what God tells Moses to tell his people. St. Paul is talking about you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are holy. Then in the Gospel we hear Jesus who is God say, “We must be perfect as our Father is perfect.” Now when most people deal with holiness they think of holy people in very weird ways. Ways that are not Scriptural. They think of holy people as those people who spend all of their time in the church and they are kneeling there. Some of those people who spend all of that time kneeling in church are nuts. You know that. They are just nuts. They spend all of their time here because they are afraid of the world, some not all. You have the Carmelites who do but they are not nuts. Some people think oh, they are the holy ones because all they do is pray. Is anywhere in the Gospel, First Reading or Second Reading, did any of those three readings you hear today talk about spending all of your time in prayer? Not one. Every single one when God looks at you and me and says to be holy then He says, “Then you love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you.”

For Him, holiness first of all as we have talked about a thousand times in our church, holiness is who you are the day you got baptized. You and I were made holy. We were set apart for Almighty God. If I take the chalice and drink Pepsi out of it because I don’t have anything else it is a sacrilege because the chalice has been consecrated and set apart for God. You and I by definition were set apart the day you and I got baptized. So by definition you and I are the temple of the Living God. You and I are the place that Almighty God dwells. And if you and I are the place where God dwells, then by definition we are holy. Are there any questions? That is what the Second Reading talks about. So you and I must accept that.

I have a book which is coming out which I need to finish by next Tuesday, March 1st. So again you have got to pray for me because it is not done yet. The book is called, ‘Surrender’. The whole book is dealing with holiness. And holiness begins when we surrender our lives completely to Almighty God and we live the way He wants us to live. We accept that He really truly dwells within us. We surrender to the God of the Universe inside of us and then we start living in such a way. Now of course the way you are going to do that is by being a person of prayer. But when you and I are really in prayer we are not saying a bunch
of prayers, we are in there in our prayer and our time and our whole life becomes prayer because I am listening to the Father and I am saying, “Father, what do you want me to do? Give me Your orders. Make me do it. I am Your slave. I exist to serve You and to please You.” So that is what prayer does. We go to prayer so we can find the will of God in our life. Then when God looks at us and He says, “Okay, this is My will. I want you to love your enemies.” “Oh, I don’t think so.” “I want you to pray for those who persecute you. I want the ones that you don’t get along with, I want you to start thinking of them as your best friend. I want you to start acting in a way that is going to make you live holiness.”

I would encourage you to just spend time with the Gospels. Spend time with that First Reading. Let us look at this together. We want revenge. How many people go to daily Mass and still want revenge? Lots! See sometimes we are just still pagans. We go to church all the time but we still have a vengeful heart. We are not growing in holiness even though we go to daily Mass. We might never miss Mass on Sunday and hate somebody. Think about it. To hate anybody and to call yourself a Christian, that cannot be. If you and I have hatred in our heart we need to repent no matter what that person has done to you. You must repent. You can’t approach this altar of love today with hatred in your heart. You just can’t do it. And if you do it you can bring a curse upon yourself. So the first thing that you have got to do to grow in holiness is you have got to surrender that hatred and say, “Lord, I hate this person but I don’t want to anymore Lord. I can’t stop Lord by myself. So please I surrender to Your Holy Spirit. May Your Spirit take control of my heart and my life and put love of this person in my heart. Right now it is only filled with hatred. I give you permission Lord. I surrender my heart to You. Change my heart and put love there for this person.” Now you are starting to grow in holiness. He says, “Offer no resistance. If someone strikes you on the right cheek turn and offer the other.

When I was in Charlotte yesterday we had about 700 men there and I was saying to them, “Gentlemen if you come and hit me, I am going to let you hit me. I am going to turn the other cheek. But then I am going to beat the hell out of you. So turn the other cheek, boom, boom, boom then I am going to kill you. It doesn’t say you can’t do it. It just says to turn the other cheek. It doesn’t say what to do after you turn the other cheek.” That is not very holy but anyway that is just part of the humanity of it all. And then it says, “Give to everyone who asks of you.” Most of us say, and I am big on this too, we have to really think about this before we do that I know, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” God says to love your enemies. What I encourage them and what I want to encourage each of us to do is we have got to start putting this holiness into practice. This holiness is always has to do with other people. It doesn’t have to do with our relationship with God. That is a given. Holiness has to do with our relationship with others and how we relate to them.

So I am going to ask you to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you those in your life the people you don’t like, the people you have resentments against, the people that don’t like you. I am going to ask you this week to write their names down on a piece of paper. Some of you it will be very short piece of paper. Some of you it is going to be a couple of sheets of paper. Then when you write all of these people’s names down, and don’t play those games like when people come to confession I ask, “Is there anybody you not forgiven? Or is there anybody you don’t like?” “Oh no, Father.” A lot of times it is because you haven’t a clue about yourself. But you can tell by the way you treat people. There are people we don’t like. There are people that I don’t like. There are people you don’t like. I do have this list that I am going
to ask you to do. Hopefully none of you will ever see it. None of your names are on here. But there are names. I ask you to put the names of the people who have hurt you. Who you haven’t forgiven. Who you resent. Then I want you to start praying for them and I want you to ask the Lord to change your heart towards them, to fill you with His Spirit. To surrender yourself to the Lord that those people that are really keeping you from holiness will now be an instrument of holiness for you. That you start to practically change. Now this isn’t easy but it begins with a willingness for it.

The command of God today isn’t a suggestion. God commands you and me to be holy. Are there any questions? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.