

August 5, 2012

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time - Cycle B

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. First of all we want to acknowledge that we have friends, guests from Canada. Would you please stand so that we can acknowledge you and welcome you to our parish. Stand up. Come on. Very good. Thank you for coming. You are always welcome down here in the USA as long as you become Steeler fans and Pirate fans. You are fine.

Anyway, this past week I got a chance to go up to New York City to buy our new window, our stained glass window which we are putting up there. And on the way up it was a seven and a half hour drive up. When I got there I wasn't a happy camper because there was something, the window was broken. So, we had a negotiation. I got money back for the parish, which turned out fine. But anyway, and then I drove back. And as I was there I was listening to a tape or a book that someone had gotten me a couple of years ago, a doctor friend of mine down in Florida. And he said, "Oh it is a great book, Father." And I had listened and read parts of it. And I even talked about parts of it in my last book. But this is the first time I listened to the whole thing because all the way up and all the way back, a lot of time to listen and to pray. And the book is called Crazy Love. Crazy Love and it is written by a Protestant pastor. It really, just punched me in the stomach all the way up and all the way back. It was like, "Holy cow, I don't even know if I am fully a follower of Christ. I don't even know if I got it." You know it was just one of these things that really challenged us because he even talks about the reality that being a Christian isn't enough to get you to heaven. You have to be a disciple.

Now everyone that comes to church is a Christian. "Oh, I believe in Jesus Christ." And I agree. It is only those who are disciples of Jesus who enter into the kingdom. So then the question is are we really a disciple of Jesus Christ? And just because you are here today doesn't say yes. Just because I am a priest doesn't mean it is automatically a yes; in fact normally not. To be a disciple means that I am living this life of faith. Now one of the questions he asks is, what have you done this past week that needed faith. Or did you live this past week that you didn't need faith at all. You didn't have to have faith for where my next meal is coming from? Am I going to get my next paycheck? What am I going to do for food? What did we do to live a life of faith?

Now if you listen to the Second Reading today, Paul tells us that we have to become these new people. And even in his congregation, now I am not going to suggest it for here because there will be an uprising. But for his congregation they give fifty percent of what they bring in to the parish away to the poor. Fifty percent! Because the Word of God, He says, "When are going to start taking Jesus at His word?" How many of us would follow Jesus if, when He called His disciples and says, "No one can be My disciple unless you deny your very self, sell all of your possessions and come follow Me." How many of us would be willing to sell all of our possessions, give to the poor, and follow Jesus? That is what a disciple does. And I was just sitting there as I was driving and I was thinking, "Oh, shut up," and have to turn off the book every once in a while and saying, "Oh, holy cow." Then I would turn it back on because there was something about, in his congregation too he challenges them, no one should live above the

medium income in the United States, which was 2006, which was \$46,000 a year. Now in Erie, that would be pretty good living. But then, so anyone in his congregation that makes over that, they give away all the excess to the poor. Anything over that. He came back from a trip in Africa and as he came back from this trip he sat there and there was people dying of starvation. So he told his wife. They have four kids. As soon as they got home, they were going to downsize. We are selling our house. We are going to get a smaller house. And then as I was driving my 2010 Explorer you know he sat there and he says, "And what kind of car do you drive?" Just shut up.

But again though, here Jesus, when He is talking about in the Gospel here today, all of these people came after Jesus for what He could do for them. They got fed with the bread. Jesus blessed me. He took care of me. So they kept following Jesus. And Jesus yells at them and says, "Don't work for the bread on earth. Work for the everlasting bread." So again, don't be following Jesus for what we get in this life. But be following Jesus for the eternal life of heaven. Again one of the things we talked about here before I quoted from his book, he says, in one of the chapters, he talks about again, "What if you could go to heaven and all of your friends were in heaven. You could be happy forever. You could eat anything you. You have a perfect body. Everything would be great. The only thing that would be missing is Jesus wouldn't be there. Would we go? And most people would say, "Well, yeah, of course I'd go." And then we sit there and think, "Well no I am not supposed to say that. I am a follower of Jesus. No I wouldn't go." But in our heart of hearts, what would we do? If we could live forever, we could have everything we want, all of our family and friends would be present. The only thing that wouldn't be present is Jesus.

And then he just challenges people to live a life of generosity. That we need to be people who are more concerned about others than we are of ourselves. That we are more concerned about pleasing God in every moment of our life than we are about pleasing ourselves, pleasing our families, pleasing our neighbors, that we are on fire as disciples of Jesus Christ. Today, when Jesus looks at us He and says, "I am the Bread of Life. Anyone who comes to Me will never be hungry. Anyone who comes to Me will never thirst." Like what I put out in my twitter account this morning, it was after I quoted that verse I said, "Jesus is enough!" But is He? For all of us, is Jesus enough? Would you be willing to get rid of all your security, everything you own, everything you have, and live your life day by day in faith of Jesus Christ and trusting in Him? I bet you most of us would not.

And so that has to be a challenge to us. Why do I follow Jesus Christ? It is for what He does for me? Or do I follow Him because I love Him? Again when I pray, is it all gimme, gimme, gimme, I need, I need, I need, I want, I want, I want? Or do I exist to please Jesus? Do I exist with my hands open before Him? Letting Him give what He wants, let Him take what He wants and blessing Him either way. Again this was an extreme challenge for me. It may put my whole world as a priest for twenty three years and put it upside down, to really sit there and start challenging me. Am I really a disciple of Jesus Christ? Am I really willing to give up everything for Him? Or do I talk a nice game? Or do I live what He wants me to live, to only do His will every day and not my own?

Again, Paul says, "We need to put on this new man." So one of his suggestions he gives after he kicks the heck out of everybody, he says, "If you are not there yet, ask Jesus for a new heart." And so that is

what I asked for most of my drive home. “Jesus you have to give me a new heart. Jesus you have to help me to love you above all things. Jesus you have to help me to start living in it and not just start talking about it. Or not take it for granted that I am doing it just because I am a priest because I am not!” Not even close and neither are a lot of us here. So today, let’s look at Jesus and say, Jesus give me a new heart. I challenge you to read the book. It will blow your socks off. By far, in the 52 years that I have lived, it was the most challenging book I have ever read and it was written by a Protestant pastor. We don’t know everything now do we? Isn’t that amazing? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.