

February 3, 2013

4th Sunday Ordinary Time - Cycle C

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. I never liked listening to the Second Reading because it reminds me of all the things I am not. Now I am sure most of you here sit there and think it reminds you of all the things that you are. But, for me it reminds me of all the failings where I fail in the various ways of love. And yet, when He begins this, it is really the way he ends the last chapter, chapter 12 verse 3 it says, "strive eagerly after the spiritual gifts and now I am going to show you what you need to strive for the most, if you will, and that is love." But that is where we have to begin. We need to strive eagerly for these things that God calls us to. Especially for the gift of love because when you have prophesy and you have speaking in tongues and you have all of that stuff, as Paul would say, for a lot of people it puffed them up. It made them spiritually proud. It made them think that they are special as opposed to the other people that don't have the gifts. So he says, "What I want you to do is you strive after love." And then he tells us what love is. And so I am sure everyone in the current community also went and when he was doing it he was slapping them is what he was doing. He says, "Love is kind. Love is patient. Love is like this." And they were all going, "Oh." Just like most of us go oh. And so what he is saying is you have to keep going. You have to keep becoming this person who becomes others centered instead of self-centered. You need to be striving after this.

That is why since I have been ordained; it is going to be 24 years believe it or not, that every time I hold up the Eucharist, it is my Lord and my God is what I say in my heart. But then right after I say my Lord and my God I say increase my love for You and for Your people. Increase my love for You and for Your people. So for over, almost 24 years I have made the same prayer to Almighty God at the holiest point of the Mass. Increase my love. Why? Because Paul says strive eagerly for this gift. This is what you need to be striving for more than anything else. What we need to strive for more than anything is that we love God more than we love others more. Period. And when I was down in St. Louis this week, there were a couple of great speakers in front of me. One was the Arch-bishop there, who gave a very good talk and then came a guy named Alan Hunt. He was a convert who had a big mega parish. He had 8,000 people at his parish every weekend. But, he kept being called, he felt called to the Eucharist, so he started this parish, made the parish grow by the Holy Spirit to 8,000 members every week in the pews. And then left it and became a Catholic.

And so when he was talking about how he gave up everything because of the Eucharist and talks about this need to grow and love of Jesus, I was just like, whoa , exactly. I mean he was infectious. I loved to listen to him. And, then I got up. And I was going to go okay, these are good guys. I had this heart that says okay Lord, let me speak a word of comfort to these men. There were 1,500 men there. And what came out of my mouth was the opposite. It was the kick in the butt, I am tired of this stuff. "Gentlemen, we are not praying." And these guys, I am thinking, shut up, shut up, shut up. Be nice. Be nice. Be nice. Nope. "Gentlemen, you do it for money. The number one problem," I said, "in the Church, in the world is that we don't pray. Priests don't pray. People don't pray." And as much as I am sitting there wanting

to say, you know, just affirm them, what came out of my mouth is... the Lord just told me you have to hit them. They don't pray. They don't spend time with me.

And that is I think for all, we need, before we can become these people of love, we need to experience what the prophet experienced today in the First Reading. Where God looked at him and says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. I consecrated you." Think about the prophets, intimacy with the Father, to hear Him say this to him. Saying, "From the moment you were conceived," before that He says here, "before I formed you in the womb, I already had intimacy with you. Now, have intimacy with Me." And when we have this great intimacy with God then we become more loving, more others centered. We don't become, like even great St. Paul, when he talks about love is gentle, love is kind, Paul was not, was he? I mean, you read the Readings. Paul was me 1,000 times worse. He was in your face constantly. Read it. I'm sure we were talking down there with the speakers and saying I bet you nobody would invite Paul to a party. Probably nobody would. Because he would be the one who would sit there and say, "Why are you doing that?" Always challenging. I would get sick of it.

You know, and so we can get sick of it but he says, "love is patient, love is kind, love is this, love is that." Then in Galatians he says, "those of you who are trying to push circumcision, I hope the next time you try, you slip and you castrate yourself." Isn't that nice, Paul? Thank you. So he was also striving, struggling to become more loving. The saint that we call Paul wasn't always a saint. He was a man striving to be more loving. Striving to be others-centered. And the way he grew in it is the same way we will grow in - when we become people of intimacy with Almighty God. When my prayer every day is the most important thing I do. Not just in our head. Not just in our commitment. But in our reality, the most important thing I do is pray.

There was a bunch of deacons and people studying for deaconate there. And they were all talking to me and there were some people in the deaconate program and I said, "Oh do you go to the daily Mass?" And they all looked at me and they said, "No." And I said, "Get the hell out! Don't you dare become a deacon if you don't go to daily Mass!" And they all looked at me like, huh? I said, "Don't do it, get out. And those of you who are deacons, if you don't go to daily Mass, get out of the deaconate. We cannot take more people that don't pray. I don't want to hear it." Do I feel bad? This is how I talk to these poor men yesterday. The poor deacons were almost ready to kill me. Good. Why? Because I challenge them to do that which they were too lazy to do. I challenged them if you are going to be a leader of the people then you must pray. There isn't an option. There isn't I am going to try. And then I told them they have to do holy hour as deacons. And all these poor deacons were... boom, boom. There were a Knights of Columbus people. Boom. Boom. You have to do it. You have to do it. No excuses I am tired of it. And again, that doesn't sound very gentle, does it? It was the exact opposite what I was thinking. And yet the Lord just put in my heart, anointed me, "I want my people to be with Me. I want them to know that I love them. And they can't know that I love them unless they commit themselves to Me." Think about how God commits himself to us. And yet we don't commit ourselves to Him.

So if we are going to be the people of love we need to be the people of prayer. It's not an option. And when we pray, how many times have I talked about this throughout the years? There is nothing else I could ever sit there and say that until we really become committed people of prayer, we are not even

close to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are not even close to striving after the spiritual gifts. Prayer must be our life. It must be, no matter what, and then everything else will follow. So today God says to you and He says to me, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." He knows all about us. And He loves us. And every time we come to prayer that is what He reminds us - I know you; I know your weakness; and I love you. And the more we experience that, the more we will become that in the world. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.