

February 10, 2013

5th Sunday Ordinary Time - Cycle C

Fr. Larry Richards

And so we see in the beginning of, the end of both the First Reading and the Gospel, the prophet in the First Reading of course says, "Here I am send me," and then the Apostles in the Gospel leave everything and follow Jesus. And where do we get, how do we get to that space in our lives where we are willing to leave everything, to give up everything to follow Jesus? Again I was, in yesterday, Tampa and it was fun this week because I was in Orlando and that and they were four of our parishioners that were there and so they came every night to the mission. And again it is a different reality to see me here at the parish on Sunday and to see me doing a parish mission or to see me at a men's conference. They would just come out and say, "Father, it is so different here." "Yes I know." It's just a different reality.

But what I was trying to get across to them you know hopefully I try to get across to here but what I think happens is you hear me so much you know and these other people it is the first time they hear me and they are shocked and they have no idea what is going on you know and they feel like they have been hit by a baseball bat, where you just get numb to the whole reality after a while. Its like, "Oh there he goes again." But the reality is how do we get there? And when I was talking to the men I say, I was talking yesterday and I say, "You know, think about all you, I wonder how many people here have had this experience, this experience of the awesomeness of God. Because when we come to this experience of God and how awesome He is and how powerful He is and how He can do everything, everything has to change. Everything changes. It's not about you start going to Mass more. It is more that everything changes. My life is now different because I have had this experience of Almighty God.

And see think about it, when the prophet, what this experience, the way you know you have it is that both the prophet and St. Peter knew how unworthy they were. But it wasn't the unworthiness that didn't come from a focus on self, it was an unworthiness that came from the focus on God because some people have an unworthiness which is not of God. We walk around thinking I am no good. I am just a sinner. And what happens is as we have talked about before is the devil keeps us focused on ourselves. And so we just sit there and so we think, "Oh I can relate well to St. Peter today because he knew he was a sinful man and I know I am a sinful man." But he didn't come to experience that knowing of his own sinfulness by focusing on himself and thinking about all the bad things he has done in his life. And again we love to do that. We just stay focused and again it is because the devil does it. It is just the reality as I have told you a million times. He picks at us and makes us stay focused on ourselves and our past. And we gladly do it. And no matter what we can never get out of our rut because we are always back here always looking at how sinful we are.

But when you and I come to this experience of Almighty God, what it is when we know our own sinfulness and unworthiness like the prophet says, "Woe is me.," it creates humility. And again, the more, it comes from the light of God. I have used the example before. Today it is a rare day in Erie, PA. The sun is out. You see? That is called sun. Now again, when the sun is shining, as it did in Florida this week, it is unbelievable what it reveals, huh? It reveals all kinds of things. So again when you are in a

room and if you ever see the sun come through and it is breaking through the glass and you just see it and you see every dust molecule there and it is floating. And you think about how we breathe this in and we breathe it out. Right now there is all this dust because the church is dirty. Not that we don't clean it, it is just there is dirt in here. It is an old church. What are you going to do? So we are breathing it in but none of us are aware of it. You can't see it. The stained glass keeps the sun from being that bright but the more sun there is the more we think, "Whoa, look at all this stuff around me." And you think, "Whoa, look at my own inadequacy compared to this." So when God's grace is big in a soul, the more God's grace is in a soul, the more aware of its own sinfulness, its own dirt if you will. And then it is like okay this is the stuff that still needs cleaned. Again when someone is in darkness, they don't know. They have no idea how dirty things are or how unworthy they are, because they are in darkness.

And so as we prepare for Lent, Lent begins Wednesday. We have to sit there and think, "What am I going to do not to keep me focused on myself?" Every single day, the bishop, who is a great guy, but every day what this guy does, is he goes to McDonald's, and he pulls into McDonald's drive thru, and as he pulls into McDonald's drive thru he always gets a sausage biscuit and a light coke. As senior coke is what he calls it. He does it every single day. So he said one year, "You know, for Lent, if Lent is going to hurt me this year, I am going to have to give it up." So for Lent every year he gives up his sausage biscuit and his light coke. I thought, "Good job, bishop." But I am thinking, hopefully that is not it. That is not all you are doing. Because again, Lent isn't just about to hurt ourselves. That is not the point. It isn't supposed to be about, "Okay, I am going to do something really hard this year. I am giving up television." Whoa. Okay but then again you are focused on self. You are focused on how can I get hurt over this? But that is not the point. The point of Lent is how do I have a deeper experience of God? How do I open myself so that I can cry out with St. Peter? Or I can cry out with the prophet? Holy, Holy, Holy are you God and I am unworthy, woe to me because I have experienced your holiness.

So what do you and I have to do this Lent to experience this holiness of God? And I would encourage you that one of the things that you have to do is do specific things that will help you do that. Reading the Scripture every day, it would be a great way to experience the holiness of God. So you decide, I am going to read the bible every day for Lent. I am going to do it. I am not going to give it up. Because again, how often do I have people come to me at confession during Lent and say, "Oh Father I gave up drinking or I gave up this and you know I fell and then I get fat and..." Focus on the positive first. We will talk about the negative next. But focus on the positive. How will you get to have this experience? You can decide every day that you are going to go to daily Mass to experience this reality of God every day in a different way. You are going to maybe make a suggestion, well maybe what I will do is every time I pass a church I will stop and make a visit; which is a little hard in Erie because most of them are locked. But any way do you remember my grandmother? Every time I passed a church I'd stop and make a visit so when the time comes when I am wheeled in, you know, in a casket, He won't say, who is it? So every time I pass a church I stop and make a visit. I decided, "Okay."

Now again if you are close to here you can stop, on the way to work, stop in the chapel, fall on your knees and say, "Jesus I love you. I give you my life." And you start that pattern in your life. So it can be spending time with the Blessed Sacrament every day. If your church isn't close to here, say your church is locked where ever you happen to live, well then pull up in front of the church and stop. The church

becomes a tabernacle. And you just sit there with Jesus for a moment and you stop and you become aware of Him. So to do something in your life, whether it is in the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, but I hope it is something that you are not doing now because again, we need to be growing in the spiritual life, right? Again, if I were to ask you what have you done last year, from last year to this day, until today can you show me how you have grown spiritually? And if the answer is, "Well, no Father, I'm just pretty much the same." Well I am sorry you have been dead for a year. If we are not growing we are dying.

So what am I going to do to grow closer to Jesus so I can have that experience of the prophets and Peter? It's the experience of St. Paul. We need this experience of God. We need it. So if we are going to truly follow Him, so the first thing I want you to focus on when you are preparing for Lent is what are you going to do? You can pick up one of the books we have in the back and decide I am going to read this book every day. But if you do those type things you have to incorporate some listening. You have to incorporate being still. You have to incorporate making sure that when you are doing the prayer things you are doing that you are encountering the living God. And you will be able to tell that is an encounter with the living God, I call it touching the throne. When you touch the throne, you know you have touched the throne. So if you just hurry up, "Oh I have to get to work today, pray fast, oh I got it done. Good." Then keep going you didn't touch the throne. You didn't have an encounter. You hurried up, very fast. You didn't have time to have this encounter with God.

So what I want to encourage more than anything, is to sit there and to think about what you are going to do this Lent to have that encounter with God. And now when you think about, what am I going to do to give up, you don't give up things just for giving up things like the cake, the candy, desert. I want you to think of your sinfulness. Now that you know your sinfulness, when you think about it, what causes my sinfulness? Where is my biggest problem? That is what you do in that category to give up. You know like the great bishop down there, I don't think his sinfulness was gluttony. So, it was good that he gave it up because he liked it. But how can we sit there, if you are a gossip, if you make it your goal that you will not say an unkind word about anybody during Lent. Hopefully then for the rest of your life, but if you can do it for Lent it will get you going. You know so that is where it is. If you are sitting there struggling with porn, well where do you get it? You get it on line most of you. So what do you do for Lent? Give up your computer. You might be sitting there, "Well I don't do that kind of stuff Father. But you know when I watch TV I don't do all the other things I need to do." Then you give up TV so you can start doing the other things you need to do. It might be laziness. So now I am going to sit there again and I am going to go against my laziness.

What is your core sin? What keeps you from fully being alive in Jesus? And again, people think it is no big deal. People, one little thread tied to a bird's foot keeps the bird from flying. One sin that has you by your soul keeps you from holiness. So really think about it. Do not naturally do what you normally do. Think about what is the sin in my life and what one thing will I have to do to deal with it? You don't have to do 50 things; one thing to get holy and experience God; one thing to deal with your sinfulness. If you do these two things you are going to have a busy and fruitful Lent. So please, don't let this Lent be any other Lent where you just do the same thing, I do the same thing every year. Stop it. Do something that God wants you to do to get closer to Him and to deal with your sin and then you and I

will have that experience that God is so holy that He loves us. That is the point. So let's stay focused on God this Lent and not ourselves. You got it? Get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen .