

May 25, 2014

6th Sunday of Easter - Cycle A

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. We had a different altar server last night so there was no one to ask me if I should speak hard or soft to everybody. Now I hear that people are mad at my homily from last week. Really? I can't imagine. I am not sorry in the littlest bit, not even the least bit. You know someone says, well I don't come to church to be yelled at. Well sometimes you do. Especially with me as your pastor. But the reality is we are called to grow. That is all. And so sometimes when Jesus was dealing with people, sometimes He was very gentle and sometimes he was very hard. And so sometimes I will be very gentle and sometimes I will be very hard. But it is the same reality. To help us all seek His will above all things. Now when we go to the Gospel today, it is a nicer the gospel. Better Gospel. They are all the same when it comes right down to it but it starts the very first line of the Gospel today is what? "If you love Me you will keep My commandments." So Jesus is telling us what it is. It cost us something to love Him. +

Now again a lot of people like to go to church. This is just about me and Jesus now. I am going to come and I am going to go to Mass. It is the only time I have peace. I am going to ask Him for things. And I am going to ask Him to take care of me and give me peace. And that is good of course that is possible and necessary but then Jesus says, "Do you love Me?" "Yes Lord." "Okay then this is what I want you to do. I want you to obey My commandments. "Ah, Lord I came to mass on Sunday just so You can take care of me. I am not really interested in You telling me what I need to do for You." Now when you come to the church, you see the cross. That is what Christ did to prove to us. If you ask I wonder if God loves me, just look at the cross and go whoa, He loves me. Well when He looks down from the cross at you and me and He says, "I wonder if they love me?" What is it you do to prove to Him that you love Him? What is it that you do to prove to Him that you love Him? That this is not a selfish act. It is an act of love. You come here.

And so He tells you this is what I want you to do. "I want you to keep My commandments." Now it is interesting isn't it that He says "keep My commandments." He does not say keep the 10 Commandments. And of course because He is God they are one in the same but he talks about keep My commandments. Now this is in the 14th chapter of John. In the 13th chapter of John, verse 34 and 35, He tells us what that commandment is. So this is later. But the chapter before He told us what His commandment is. John chapter 13 verse 34 says what for any good Protestant here? John 13 verse 34 says "This is My commandment, love one another as I have loved you." Verse 35 says "This is how all people will know You are My disciples," How? "By your love for each other." So when Jesus is talking about His commandment, "If you love Me keep My commandment," He says "Then, if you love Me I want you to love each other."

Now again sometimes that love will be strong. Sometimes it will be soft. But we have to love each other. That means that we put each other in front of us. That is what love is. Love does not think about the self. Love is always more concerned about the others. Now again sometimes we won't well. Sometimes we won't do that so well. But that means that when I come to church I am called explicitly by God to be

more concerned about the other people there. The other day I had to go to the doctors. I went to the doctors, it is Dr. Yakish who is my doctor on West 38th Street, and the across is the Grace Baptist Church. Used to be Grace Baptist Church. The old Grace Baptist Church and they had in the front about 10 spaces said parking for visitors only. And I thought oh that would work real well if I did that at our place. You know parking for visitors only. Sometimes that means what? I would have to give up my parking spot for somebody else? Really? When I came to church I wouldn't be able to sit where I always sit every Sunday? Someone else might take my seat? It is my seat. That is my parking space. But that is not what Jesus says. He says when you come to church nothing is yours. When you come to church you need to be more concerned about others than you are about yourself.

Now my way of doing this is to challenge people. When I hear confessions at parish missions, you might have 1000, 2000 people to go to confession and we only have 10 priests. I say, "Okay, this is the way we are going to do this tonight is we are going to do this by triage." Do you know what a triage is? The people that have a hanging arm off go before those who have a cold. And so I tell the people, "So those of you who always go to confession and have no mortal sins, you have to wait until the end. You can go but you have to wait until the end. We need the other ones to go before you." And you can see the anger in some people's faces. You can just see when they look at me and say you die Father. Instead of oh Father this isn't about me. I only have a cold. I only have venial sins that are taken care of at every Mass. I will gladly give up my space so someone else can go who has a hanging limb.

You see, until we get that mindset that when I come to church it isn't about me and my worship of God, it is about coming and listening and obey Him when He asks me to do something. Because that is true worship. True worship is not just about singing songs that make you feel all good inside. It just isn't. True worship is looking at God and saying what do You want of me? And then He says okay. I want you to love each other. Then you do it. That is worship. You do what God wants. Now again when you praise God of course that is worship too. But He is calling us to a deeper worship. And again sometimes that makes us uncomfortable. Sometimes, come on Father, I know. But when we do this we are life giving and receive life. When Jesus says to us, "If you love Me you will obey My commandments and then he says I will love you. And I will reveal Myself to you." How will he reveal himself to you? "Whatever you do to the least of My brothers and sisters, you do to Me."

So when you and I start putting other people first, we are revealed that that Who I am reaching out and putting first, is who? Jesus. So I am giving up my seat for Jesus. So I give up my parking space for Jesus. That I start living this life which is others centered. I start listening to what God says. Now is that going to hurt me? Yes. I like when things always go my way. I like having my special seat. I like having a parking space right next to the door. I like these things. And when I say no I just and put other first, that is going to hurt. Yes. But it is going to give you life. It is going to give others life. That is the joy of when we follow the lord. That when He calls me to do something I always get life and then what He is doing is see sometimes we separate ourselves from one another. That is not of God. In fact the first time we were separated from one another was at the Tower of Babel. God separated us. But at Pentecost, which we will celebrate in a couple of weeks, what happens? The Holy Spirit who Gods says today in the Gospel was inside of us, what does the Holy Spirit do? He makes us one. That not only does God dwell in me and loves me but God dwells in that person next to me, who I am sitting next to and I might not

even know their name. But God is just as present in them as He is in me. And when I start recognizing Him in everybody around me, I am starting to get what it is. Now I am starting to see truth. Now I am starting to see the way God sees. That we are interconnected with each other. We are always trying to outdo one another in putting the other person first. Yes, He will live in us. He will love in us. And He will reveal Himself to us because then we will start to see Him in the people around us.

And so I just want you to think about it, when you come to church, is this about you focused on God or is this about you focused on God and focusing on the people around you. Because that is what He wants. Sometime, somewhere it must be said and I think it is said in more than any other place I have to tell you the truth, so far in Erie anyways, as Jesus said, "The way you will know they are My disciples is because you love each other." And I think we do that here. But can we do that better here? Yes. So I want us to think about again, how can I give away my life? And we talked about it last week so I can do what Jesus does and greater more than Him. But more so today, how can I see Jesus in the people around me at church? And how can I start putting them first? Letting them have the better space? Letting them do a better... and do that in a practical way. And you know when you start doing that every week, you are going to have this joy in you because now you are not so concerned about you and your parking space or whatever it happens to be, that just happens to be what I am focusing on in this moment. Then you are saying I gave up my life this Sunday for Jesus and for others. You know what He did for me? He gave me greater life.

And then what we are doing is we are speaking about this hope. And this hope that is within us as it says in the Second Reading, which I built a whole foundation on, "Always be ready to give a reason for your hope." If you ever notice the foundation, that is where it stops. We don't use the whole verse because the second part of the verse says, "But speak kindly and reverently," because I don't do that well. So we just let that part go. But anyways we need to add that part as the year.... I keep hoping as I get older I will become more gentle. Oh I am.... Stop it... you have to love me too thank you very much. I am just saying that right now, just so you know. But the reality is is that call of Almighty God is that we love Him and if we prove we love Him we obey His commandments. His commandment is, "Love one another as I have loved you." And when I start loving people He reveals himself to us and the people around us. You got it? You get it? You going to live it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.