

September 7, 2014

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. Are you ready? Today the Second Reading says, "Love is the fulfillment of the law." That's the way it ends and the whole thing about love. And again that's what we have to look at all three of the readings through today. Because when we look at the First Reading, and also the Gospel, we sit there and we do the exact opposite, right? When He says, "Now you," He's calling us to be prophets in the First Reading. He's talking to us and telling us we have to tell the wicked when they're wicked, correct? And when we think about the wicked, we sit there and we think of all the immoral people around us, correct?

But when you think of the wicked and you have to look at the person in the mirror every day, that's who He's talking about. Us! Because we can be wicked when we're not loving. But see we never think of ourselves as being wicked, we just think of those 'other people' who do these horrible things. You know the ones that everybody is against and the one we like to jump onto because it makes us feel better. So when the prophet comes, the one who is wicked, according to God, is the one who doesn't fulfill his command of love. Right? So we got to sit there and watch when we are thinking about, well I got to be the prophet. You got to be the prophet that's telling people they're not loving people enough. And they're going to love that.

And then we go to the Gospel and again the mis-interpretation of the Gospel. Jesus says, "Now if someone wrongs you, go and tell them they wronged you and try to reconcile. If they don't, then take someone else. If they still don't, then take them to the Church. and if they still don't, then treat them as a tax collector or a gentile," which means you love them. Right? Was not St. Matthew a tax collector? Was He not talking to him? And He said, "See how we deal with Matthew, that's how I want you to deal with tax collectors and the gentiles." So we don't dismiss them, we don't judge them, we don't push them away, we love them all the more.

Now again this is easy to talk about, right? Again if tonight at 6:30 on, you know a couple months ago, or four months ago, I told you that I went and was with Danny Abramowitz and we filmed the Crossing the Goal. And on there we are talking about the, it's the first one started last Sunday and we continue and I'm on four of them. And what we're doing is we are talking about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit on EWTN. So we actually pray for the outpouring of the Spirit. We are doing a Life in the Spirit conference on Crossing the Goal. And so anyway, he kind of, and I talked about this a couple of months ago 'cause I was so shocked by it, because we're talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and which ones we have and which ones we struggle with. And so Danny looked at me and didn't tell me the question before and he says, "So Father, what are the gifts that you struggle with the most?" And everybody thought I would say

patience, you know, and that's one I got a lot of, I don't even know why people would say that. But I sat there and said, "It's love. That's the one I struggle with the most." And they were all like shocked and I was shocked; I thought I shouldn't have said that one. That was not a good one to say. I guess it's the pretty core one.

But again, because to love someone means that we're going out of ourselves more concerned about other than we are about ourselves. It means we are doing things when we put other people first. And sometimes, that's a struggle. And I was thinking about too, when I first got ordained, when I got ordained 26 years ago as a deacon, when I put this ring on my finger, now I can't get the ring off any more 'cause I got fat, but right after I took my vow October 18, 1988, when I took my vow to be a deacon, I put this ring on my finger to show I now belong to God and to remind what my life must be. And the rings says "love one another as I have loved you." And it doesn't say that facing out so that if someone sees it, it says it facing in to remind me first. This is the command He has given me, "Love one another as I have loved you."

That's why when you walk out of church every day for 13 years at this parish, as long as I have been here, the one you see on the board out there is "Jesus commands us to love one another." To remind us, this is what I got to be. And then I remember that that's always the one that I struggle with the most. And I can talk so well about it, but it's the one that I miss the most. And so, every day, I got to ask God to do it. You know, again when I was newly ordained over at Our Lady of Peace, and I used to still do all the Youth Retreats and everything else, we used to always talk about that movie, The Breakfast Club, remember The Breakfast Club? The kids don't remember it, but it was a big movie for kids when I was a younger priest. and Father Detisch used to show that movie, the whole movie at every retreat he ever gave.

Anyway, I would just use the one part, because if you remember the one, there all in detention and they all talk to each other. And there's one girl who's kind of crazy and you know, she draws a picture of a landscape and a house and she puts her head over and she does her dandruff, she puts snow on there and everything. And it's quite interesting, but anyway, in their circle, they're discussing something and she says, I'll never forget it, she says, "It's unavoidable, it just happens when you grow up, your heart dies." And so I used to get up and I'd do commencement talk and everything I'd say, "That's what it says. You all know that?" and they go "Yes." And I say, "What am I going to say to you, never grow up." Then all the kids would go, "Yeah!" But that's what it has got to be.

When we grow up, we protect our hearts more because we realize everyone we have ever loved has hurt us. Correct? Everyone you have ever loved will hurt you. And so when we're younger, we were willing to take that stance more. "Okay, hurt me, its okay." And we go around and give our heart to everybody and we can be very loving. But you can tell those of us who have had our hearts stamped on more. You know again, me being an adult child of an alcoholic, me having a father who was very bad when he drank. You know when you're doing that as a kid, you have all those hope and that, and someone stamps on you, and stamps on you, you don't put the heart out

there more. In fact, you protect it, and sometimes you're rough when you do that. It's a way of protecting your heart. And so all of us learn these various ways to protect us but also to keep us from loving. Right? And so when we look at Jesus, and He commands us and He says, "Love is the fulfillment," you look at the cross. He isn't protecting himself at all, is He? He's giving Himself completely, open and He's saying "now this is the way I want you to love others."

So we have a choice, we can decide to keep protecting ourselves or we can decide that I am going to open myself and try with all my heart to be more loving. And so one of the things I have done since I've been ordained and I've told you this before, is every time I hold up the Blessed Sacrament, be it His Precious Body or His Precious Blood, I hold up Jesus and the first thing I say is "Jesus, increase my love for You and for Your people and forgive me my sins," because I have a lot of sins. I don't know if you knew that. But anyway, Jesus, increase my love for You and Your people and forgive me my sins. So what we need to do, I think is just ask for that. And when we ask for that, He will give it to us. But then we got to make sure that we put that into practice and we focus on it. Okay, I got to be more loving; I got to be more loving. And it can be just simple.

You know we're the main church if not the only Catholic Church that are completely being part of the Rock the Lake thing in a couple weeks. We're going to have thousands of people come and Billy Graham's son going to come and we are going to have many people come to give their life to Christ. And then, every Catholic who gives their life to Christ, we at this church, are going to get their names. And then that first week, we are going to have to reach out and there's 50 people who have already signed up, we're going to have to probably get some more of you if there's a lot of people, 'cause I think there's going to be about 1000 Catholics that give their life to Christ that day. Then we're going to have make contact with them, personal contact in the first week. And then they are going to start coming here to church every Sunday. Ha, ha, ha.

So what do you think we need to do with these people? First thing, we got to love them. Because everyone who walks in this door will be who? Jesus! That means we got to smile at them, if we have, you know, people drive me most crazy in our church, I don't think there's anybody at this mass, there might be, the people that have their own seats. And they say, "That's my seat." Does anyone here have their own seat? No. If anyone does say "this is my seat." you're wicked. I'm calling you out because I don't want to go to hell for you. So you got to sit there and know that if you sit there and say, "This is my seat," that's a wicked act. You have no seat. And if anyone ever sits there and says, "This is my seat", you call them out to me, would you? Say, "Father, he or she won't give up their seat, or told me to get out of it. "Then I will call that wicked person to accountability because that is what the First Reading says.

We call people who are wicked, people who aren't loving. And so God tells us we have to call them out in love, right? Say, "Excuse me, you're not being very loving here." Sometimes we think love is just being la, la. Is that true? Sometimes love is a kick in the butt, correct? Because so they can go to heaven and so we can go to heaven. And so when we do this, it's

about being more concerned about others, it's about doing everything in our power to get others to heaven and it's about loving the way God calls us to love. Each of us are going to do this the way we can, and all of us can do it better. Agreed? Everyone here. And some of you might think, "Oh Father I am very loving with my family." But what does Jesus say? "If you just love those who love you, what good is that? Even the pagans do that."

We're called to love who, our enemies, everyone we meet. We're called not to judge those who are moral, because no where does it talk about immorality today. Yet we're the ones who judged them so easily because they're being immoral, they've done these horrible things. And yet we forget to look that I haven't been the most loving person. And what happens when you and I die? We will be judged on how we've loved. Not how moral we were but how loving we were. How we sat there and we spoke for truth, how we gave up our life for others, how we were more concerned for others than we were about ourselves. Because that is the way God is with us. So all of us have to grow. All of us have to ask God to increase my love for you and for your people so that we can be Christ on earth and be an instrument of salvation to all we meet.

You got it? You get it? You going to do it? Don't lie to a priest it will be bad. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.