

March 12, 2017 – Second Sunday of Lent - Cycle C

Father Larry Richards

Good Morning! How are you? You can see I got sick again. I was really good for four days this week and then Thursday when I'm doing the anointing of healing service, I feel (cough, cough) oh – don't you start. So you got to pray for my healing. It's enough of this. It's been like a month so enough, enough, enough, enough.

But anyway, in the midst of it, we sit there and we listen to the Second Reading today and it says, "Beloved, bear your share of your hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God." Bear your share of the hardship of the Gospel. See again, this is the issue. Most people just want to see the Gospel as something that just gives us joy always but He says there is hardship in the Gospel. Today in the Gospel, we see Peter, James, and John and Jesus transfigured before them. Now you do realize that when God the Father appears to Jesus and He tells Him that "You are my beloved," the first time He says this to Him, Jesus is then sent out by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Right? Now He comes and says, this is my beloved, "this is My beloved Son" and Jesus is sent out to die on the cross.

So here it is: Jesus is told He is beloved and special and now you are going to have to do something hard both times. Now Peter, James, and John just wanted to stay on the mountain top for the mountain top experience. Peter says, "Let's build three things here for you three and we can stay here and be joyful forever." And He goes, "No, no. You're going to have to go with Me to the cross" is what's happening. It's that hardship.

Now, the reason we call it a hardship is because anytime there is the Gospel, the Gospel is love. So, we don't focus on the hardship of it. We focus on when you and I love somebody, something, some God, the God of the universe, that there's hardship there because love demands sacrifice from me. Right?

Every one of you who are in love with your spouse, if it's all about you in that relationship, then I'm sure your spouse doesn't want to be around you. Right? If you're in love with somebody, you lay down your life for them. Love, by definition, demands a cross. Love, by definition, demands sacrifice or there is no love. Right? So any kind of religion or Christianity that focuses on no sacrifice and no cross is not by definition Christianity. It just isn't. It's a perversion that thinks about what can I get out of this religion? What can God do for me? If I give myself to Jesus, what do I give out of it?

So, Jesus is explicitly telling the apostles, "No, no, no, no, no. You're going to have a hardship now. You're going to have to embrace the cross of love. Because when you love others, you give away your life for them." Then what He does after this is He says to them, "Don't be afraid." Isn't that a glorious thing? Yes, you're going to have to go through a cross. Yes, you're going to have hardships but we don't have to be afraid. Why - Because Jesus did it first for us

and He does it with us and that's what Lent's about. Remember, I talked about in the beginning, we go through Lent with Jesus not for Jesus as I said on Ash Wednesday. We go through Lent with Him, not for Him. So, I walk with Him in this Lent. I walk with Him in my Christian life and there is hardship because there was hardship for Jesus but it's a hardship of love.

Again, after He says, "Don't be afraid," it says, the one little comment here, "They looked up and only saw Jesus." For us to do what we need to do, not just Lent but every day of our life, we got to keep our eyes focused on Jesus. When you and I focus on Jesus, then we can do what we do because now my whole life becomes an act of love to Him. So, yes there is going to be hardship. Yes, He's going to ask me to deny myself – just like if I have a kid, I have to deny myself for my children. There is no Christianity without the cross; no Christianity without sacrifice; no Christianity without giving our life freely the way Jesus did. But again, when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we don't have to be afraid because the eyes fixed on Jesus knows that the cross always leads to resurrection. Exactly correct. So, this is where we're going.

So, yes you're going to have hardship. Yes, you're going to have to sacrifice. But yes, you will have resurrection. That's the promise of every Lent. So, don't get stuck on the sacrifice. Get stuck on love and resurrection and then you'll get through the sacrifice.

You got it? Get it? Going to live it? May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.