

December 3, 2017

First Sunday of Advent – Cycle B

Fr. Larry Richards

Good Morning! How are you? (Blessed!) Today the readings remind us of, you know, remember Father Benedict Groeschel, God rest him, he used to talk about, you know, when you'd see in New York City, the signs that were up and people would be holding the signs that say "The end is near". He'd go over and say "promises, promises". You know, that that's the end. But Jesus is telling us that. That you never know when the end is gonna come. So we need to focus, I'm gonna focus on the first reading, though. Because here's Isaiah and he's complaining. And he's complaining to God, but he's also trying to get the attention of people. And usually that's where we find out the most about ourselves, right? Like I know when people in the parish are complaining about me (I know it never happens) every day when someone's complaining about me, they're trying to tell me something. They're hoping that it gets back to me that they were complaining. And you know it always does. But the reality is when it is there's something truthful there. Sometimes not the way it's said but there's something truthful there. So here is Isaiah and he's complaining about the people. What he says here is what I want to focus on. He says "there is none who calls upon your name. Who rouses himself to cling to you. There is none who call upon your name who rouses himself to cling to you." So what that means is that we need to then call upon His name and we do need then to rouse our self and cling to Jesus.

As we begin the new church year and that begins today, the first Sunday of Advent, I always like to take us as a parish, but us as individuals, and take a spiritual pulse of all of us. So we first of all look at our life December 1, 2016. And then we go to today, December 3, 2017. And I want you to look and reflect on this and I encourage you to do it later on today in deeper detail, but how have you grown spiritually with the Lord? How can you say that you have now grown more in love with Jesus, you know Him better, you know His will better, you're doing, how have you grown this year? And I want you to be able to give me very practical ways to do that, huh? What have you done? This year, and I did it, I spent, I fast every day now, I spend time with different Bible studies every day, I've been following Jesus over 50 years. I know, believe it. And yet, I still have so far to go. We all need to be growing. Now if you go and you look at your past year from last December to this December and you go "no, Father, it's pretty much the same. I go to mass every week, I try to be a good person, I say my prayer every once in a while and that's about it." Well, as I've said a hundred billion times, that means you haven't grown and if you're not growing you're dying. So you have been dying spiritually for a year because there's been no growth there. So what I'd encourage us to do is we make resolutions for the New Year, and this is the New Year for spiritual resolutions. That we focus on that this will be the year that we grow in the Lord, huh? That we truly become disciples because a disciple is growing every day. And we're gonna do that two ways.

The first we're gonna focus on what we cling to because all of us cling to something, right, and what you love is what you cling to. And so what is it that you cling to? Is it Jesus? Do you cling to Jesus for your very life? Or do you cling to the things of the world? Do you cling to the people of the world? Do you cling to yourself? Do you cling to your sin? So one of the first things I'd encourage us to do as we do an examine of our life is to look at the sin in our life and see what sins we cling to.

Beginning with the mortal sins and then we decide that I'm gonna get this sin out of my life this new year. I'm gonna work hard on getting sin, this particular one, we won't be able to get rid of all of our sins, but focus on one. Beginning with the mortal sins, huh? So mortal sin: missing Mass on Sunday is what? A mortal sin. You die in mortal sin, what happens? Go to hell, do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars. Now people say "I don't buy that, Father", well nobody asked you. It's amazing how many of you miss mass on Sunday and then go to communion the next Sunday. Like no big deal. It's a sacrilege! Right? So if you drop dead and you receive communion a sacrilege, that's a very bad way to do it. So you gotta sit there and think maybe that's your sin. I go to mass when I feel like it instead of when God tells me to and obey Him. So I miss mass on Sunday, so for the new year, I will not miss mass on Sunday. Period. It might be something like, it could be getting drunk. To get drunk. If you get drunk on purpose, what is it? Mortal sin. So okay I'm gonna deal with drinking in this new year. I'm not gonna cling to drinking anymore. I'm gonna cling to Jesus. Another thing could be your sexuality. You know, some people it would be impurity in thought. Impurity with self. You know, again objectively mortally sinful. So maybe this will be the year I'm gonna deal with this sin of impurity. Not being married and being impure with someone else. The Word of God, I don't care what the world says, the Word of God says in Ephesians 5:5-7 "make no mistake about it, no fornicator, no unclean or lustful person, in effect an idolater of any inheritance of the kingdom of Christ or of God, let no one deceive you with worthless arguments. These are sins that bring down God's wrath on the disobedient, therefore have nothing to do with them." The Word of God says that people who have sex outside of marriage will not enter the kingdom of heaven. You can sit there and say "well Father, I think that's old fashioned." Nobody asked you. God made the rule! We obey or disobey. So it could be like, okay, Lord, this year this is what I'm gonna deal with. I'm gonna get this out of my life. Because I don't want to kill anybody and if I'm having sex outside of marriage I kill the soul of the person I do that to. So I can't say I love them if I'm killing their soul, right? So okay, I'm gonna get this out of my life. Or it might be looking at porn. Okay it kills, I use people, I kill the soul of myself and I kill the soul and I use them as an object of my pleasure. Okay Lord, I'm not gonna deal with, do that anymore. By your grace, help me.

It might not be mortal sins, because some of you sit there and think "yeah Father, I don't know why you're even talking about this, I don't have any mortal sins". Well, you have that pride, which is almost as bad. So that's an aside. But there could be the venial sins, huh? Those venial

sins that sit there and judge other people, that gossip, you know, that have the sin of detraction that could sit there in your little angers and pettiness.

We all have certain sins. Again, if you don't have any sin, please come up here right now so we can all bow before you and kiss your feet, you saint. There is nobody here that doesn't have something that we gotta deal with. Now again, I'm not saying this to make us feel guilty. I'm saying this to help us to grow. You know a woman called me the other day on my radio show and she says "you know, Father, am I allowed to go to communion? I live with my boyfriend." And I go "Of course not, of course not. I'm not doing this to make you feel bad. I'm just telling you the truth." Huh? I don't do any of this stuff, you know really, you think I love to get up here and make people feel bad? I don't. Alls I'm doing is holding up a sign that says "Bridge Out Ahead". Don't get mad at me. I'm just saying. How often do I deal with a sin homily? Not that often. Well, I've been dealing with sins of omission lately.

But again, these are things that I cling to and we cling to. So okay Lord, help me to cling to you. And the way we cling to Jesus is I mean talk about clinging to Him I've used an analogy before, but it's like you're out in the boat and you fall in the water and you're drowning because you don't know how to swim. And you're going down for the last time and someone goes and jumps in to grab you. And you cling to them for your very life. Do you cling to Jesus for your very life? Is your relationship, your walking with Jesus a disciple, is it walking with Jesus every day, or is it just Sunday? Is it coming to Him every day and saying "Jesus, I'll do anything you want today. I exist to please you". That means, as I've talked about a thousand times, our prayer life has always got to be more listening. Please, if there's anything to do in your spiritual life this year, every day you come before the Lord, and say "I exist to please you today, tell me what you want me to do". That's where we grow the most. Because now we're clinging to Jesus and we're looking to Him to tell me what He wants me to do, today. Not just in my life. Not just to make a decision about where shall I move, what shall I do, what school shall I go to. Big things, of course, but every day He has a will for you.

If you woke up this morning, it's because He has something for you to do today. You've gotta ask Him "What is it Jesus you gave me another day of life for?" And He'll tell you if you listen. So in this year of growing I decide every day I'm gonna listen to God. In my daily prayer, which I pray every day and I will listen to God. And then what happens is we become disciples. And see, what God's calling us to do, is again, not be focused on our self and our sinfulness. I just don't want us to cling to these things, because when we cling to them, God gives us what we want. And surely it's not our sin that we want. And surely it's not the bad things in our life that we want. Surely, it's Jesus that all of us want. That's why we're here. And so just let that become more real in our lives this year. So the day when Jesus does come and the end is finally upon us and He looks at us and says "I'm gonna give you what you want the most", we'll all be able to say "Jesus, that's you. Jesus, that's you." And we cling to Jesus for our very life. You got it? Get it? Gonna do it? Don't lie to a priest, it's a sin. May each of you know His love, today and forever, Amen.