

December 24, 2017 – Christmas Vigil Mass- Cycle B  
Fr. Larry Richards

Merry Christmas! How are you? Blessed indeed! It's Christmas! Oh my favorite time of the year, my favorite celebration. By far. The only other one that's my more favorite is Midnight Mass tonight, that's my big mass.

Now when we focus on Christmas, it's about Jesus right? It's about the gift exchange between us and God. Every Christmas is about gift exchanges is it not? He's the one that started it all, by the Father giving us His Son, by Jesus giving us Himself. That He is the one that started this gift giving thing. And that's why every year at Christmas we give gifts. Some give a few gifts, some give none. I hope you at least get one gift. And some people give lots of gifts. This year I have, I will have given, they're not all out yet. When I get home to my family and my staff and everybody else that works for me, all these different places, I'll have given 249 gifts, I will have wrapped 198 gifts, all myself. You'd think I'd have other people to do this stuff, oh no no. That's why it takes me a long time. This is the first year that I was done with every wrapping of every gifts, four days ago. It was like "Oh my gosh!" It's from the fasting it's given me a lot of energy, it's the greatest thing. By doing all this stuff it's the most important thing, not the getting but the giving. I love doing it. I think of every single person, and what I will get them and how I'm going to do it. Will it make them happy? Will it not make them happy? The worst person in the world to do that for is my mother, because I'll sit there and I'll think about it, I'll think about it and I'll get her something and she'll go "what am I going to do with this?" Oh there's nothing worse than ungratefulness at Christmas is there?

And yet here God gives the gift of Himself and some will say "do I have to go to Mass? Do I have to do this at Christmas? I hate this stuff!" And yet God gives us everything. I want you to think about and I want us to know how blessed we are at Christmas. Jesus Christ, the God the Universe cannot contain, became a baby for us. For three things, the first thing is, as we already talked about, to pay for our sins. He was born to die. Now I don't know about you, but I sure need a Savior, I can't do it myself. I know it. So when someone comes as Jesus Christ comes and He takes my sins upon Himself so I can live forever. That makes me very blessed. Very grateful, that the whole reason "you shall name Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins." Jesus was born to save you from those sins that you willingly committed. He would pay the penalty just so you and I can live with Him forever. We are blessed.

The second reason that Jesus came and was born was to prove to us that He loves us. That here the Holy, Holy, Holy God came down and became one of us as a baby and again, this baby we can do anything with right? Just like the Eucharist today, we could take Him, we could kill Him, and we could destroy Him. He'd become vulnerable for you and for me to prove He loves us, He has nothing else to give. He gave Himself. And again, we should just be grateful and meditate on that. Jesus you came to give yourself and prove that you love me. And the deepest need in everyone's heart is to be loved. And the problem is we try to look everywhere else to fill the emptiness inside. But I promise you the only one who will fill your emptiness and

the need to be loved is Jesus. I promise you that. Because no matter what else you try, it will fill you for a while, even the greatest people in the world, will still hurt ya and still betray ya. No matter what, even if they love you with all their heart. Because we are all human beings we all fail, none of us are perfect, Jesus is and He loves you with a perfect, perfect love.

Lastly, what Jesus came for, was to just be with us. Today, in our society, loneliness I think is the greatest sickness that we have, people are lonely. You know and they go on Facebook or Twitter or LinkedIn, just to sit there and have all kinds of friends. You know on my Facebook, my regular page, I have 5,000 friends, isn't that exciting? I don't know any of them. They're not my friends, I'm sorry, I know a few of them, maybe 100, everybody else I haven't a clue. Nice people, they saw me give a talk, they want to be my friend, great! But it doesn't feel the need to not be alone. Jesus has always filled that need. Every day when I'm with Him in the morning, Jesus embraces me. And if I wake up in the middle of the night, I know that I'm not there alone, this God, this Emmanuel, is always with us. You are never alone. Jesus came to prove that to you; to get into your flesh and my flesh and to be one of us. We just have to acknowledge His presence. You gotta be still sometimes and just think I am not alone. Only He will fill that emptiness inside.

But as we come and He gives us these three gifts this Christmas, remember all Christmas is, is an exchange of gifts. I don't know if you ever experienced this, but you go and someone buys you a gift and you don't get anything for them and the other person is like "oh thank you." Again, especially with my family, you know tomorrow night my family, my nephew who I'm not going to talk about right now. He's in my doghouse right now. But he's going to bring his girlfriend who he lives with, I don't want to talk about it. But I come over and I sat there and thought "that's it I'm mad" right? But I had to go and buy her presents, because I can't let anyone come to my house, my mother's house, and feel alone, or judged. So I got her some nice presents, now I'm still mad about the whole situation but no one will feel unloved for my house for Christmas. Even if I don't agree with them, right? That's the way it is. So I gotta make sure I get something for God.

Now every Christmas what we do here is after Communion, we will all kneel down and we will give our life to Christ because that's the biggest gift He wants, is our life, first of all. So we'll do that as we do every Christmas. Then it's not enough is it? Because if I went home to my family and said "my Christmas gift this year is me", they would not be very excited. They would be like "is that it?" That's it, that's all you got! Do you want anything more? Yes they want more, it's Christmas, I can't imagine. Some of us tonight might come to Jesus and say "hey Jesus, my Christmas gift this year is me!" It's that it? Yep that's it Jesus!

I think we need to give Him something, so this year what I'm going to do is after I say "I'm going to give you my life" and then we will say "this Christmas, Jesus, I'm going to give you as my gift..." then I'll be silent and I want you to fill in the blank. What you going to give to Jesus, this Christmas, specifically. And I want you to think about what time we have left in this Mass, what you will give to Jesus Christ this year. Will you come to Him on His birthday and

give Him nothing? You could just say “Jesus this year I promise my gift to you will be, I’ll spend five minutes a day with you in prayer.” Simple. “Jesus this year I promise you I won’t miss Mass on a Sunday.” “Jesus this year I will promise you, I will be nice to someone who hates me.” “Jesus this year I promise you, I’m going to get one sin out of my life, and this is the sin.” I’m going to stop gossiping Jesus, I’m going to stop looking at porn, Jesus. I’m going to stop. This is my gift to you Jesus, whatever it is, you know what He’s been working on in your heart the most. You know. So this year I want you to ask what does He want?

And then after Communion we kneel down and give our life to Jesus and I say “and Jesus this year I give you this gift...” and I have silence there I want you in your heart to give something to Jesus very specifically because that’s what He wants. And then this Christmas will be a true Christmas. A true exchange of gifts. A true love relationship not where He just gives to us but that we give back something specifically that He would like us to give Him.

You got it? You get it? You gonna do it? Do you hate me on Christmas? No! That’s right, so thing about what you’re gonna give to Jesus after Communion. May each of you know His love, today and forever, Amen. Merry Christmas.