

September 2, 2018- 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning! (Good morning!) And how are you? (Blessed!) Blessed. I just got off to my five day silent retreat and it was very nice. It was one of the most prayerful and wonderful and peaceful retreats I've had in many years, so thank you for your prayers. But it was also one of those times when the Lord kept speaking to my heart and kept, you know, on me about lots of things. You know, today when we listen to the readings, we deal with the Gospel and Jesus talks about our hearts and where our heart is, and what comes from within us. And then the second reading tells us how to best deal with our hearts and it says the Word, humbly receive the Word and then to do something about it. But let's all begin where the Gospel begins, or ends today, anyway, and let's look at our hearts. You know, when I was on retreat, it was a beautiful place on Long Branch, New Jersey, right? The retreat house, San Alfonso's is right on the ocean beach. And so I'd be sitting there during the day, it was like 95 sometimes but I loved it. And so you'd sit there and see all these people on the beach and having fun with their families and kids and all this stuff there, and I just thought, "God, you love them all intimately, you know each of them and their needs, and I don't love any of them." Right? Don't know 'em; not the least bit interested in getting to know them, but there is God who loves them. And then I says, "God, you've gotta change my heart. You've gotta help me to truly see all people – that they're worthy of love. And not just other people's love, by my love. My heart must change." And so I kept asking God for a heart transplant during this week. "You've gotta give me a heart transplant, I need a new heart." And then, you know, I purposely stayed away from Facebook and all that stuff, because people have gotten crazy on there, especially all this stuff with the Pope, you know, and about, "he's been silent" and you know, "this person said this" and "he needs to resign" and I'm just thinking, "Really? Really?" And so people all this week, I posted something in support of Pope Francis yesterday on my Facebook and Twitter and different things and I had to take it off because I was getting so mad at the responses. I wanted to kill people last night. And I thought, that's not a heart transplant, I need a really big heart transplant now! But again, though, when it comes...they say "Father, you've gotta tell us what you believe, what you know." I don't know anything. Somebody wrote a letter. The letter's pretty harsh. You know, and so someone's convicted and not only convicted the Pope, but said he needs to resign and the people all, like with the nasty, the horrendous things people said about me last night, the horrendous things.

Two weeks ago after my homily about me being abused when I was seventeen I was on my radio program and people brought that up and then they were horrendous to me. Horrendous. Like how dare I forgive somebody, how dare I give mercy to someone who doesn't deserve mercy? And they were like, so harsh. It was... I literally said it was the worst day of my priesthood. And it wasn't 'cause I was taking stuff for what other priests did. It was because I was taking stuff because when I was abused I offered mercy and forgiveness to that person. "How dare you! How dare you! How dare you." Where are our hearts before God that we would so easily condemn? Where are our hearts before God that we would demand of the Vicar of Christ

that “you will get out of the p...” you do realize that every apostle betrayed Christ. Peter, the Pope, betrayed Christ publicly. Should he have resigned? According to us, “Yes! Absolutely! He betrayed Christ!” And yet Christ lifted him up and made him and restored him as Pope. How unlike Christ we have become. We just condemn everyone who doesn’t agree with us. And what do we do? We find out what people are worthy of our love and what people are not worthy of our love. What people are deserving of our mercy and what people are not deserving of our mercy. Who amongst us here, if they were caught, if God, who already knows us at our worst sin and if we were publicly exposed, all of our worst sins would not run away in complete horror? Who of us here does not deserve mercy? Who of us here have never done anything that’s wrong, that we wouldn’t want to be restored as a father, you’re horrible at your wife or your kids – you should be thrown out of your family – “How dare you come back to your family? How dare you accept and ask for mercy?” We all need as a church a heart transplant. When we’re gonna be judged at the end of our life, we will not be judged on how right we were. I promise you. We will be judged on how we loved and how we gave mercy. We need heart transplants. And if you can listen to the Gospel today, look at the Pharisees. They were looking to be offended, right? “Let’s see what He’s gonna...aha! We’ve got Him now.” And people of these times look to be offended.

There are many things that are wrong in our church and we’ve talked about it. I am sick of talking about it, to tell you the truth. But what happens is our hearts need to change and we can tell what’s in our hearts like you can tell what’s in my heart is what happens when it gets squeezed. Right? If you squeeze an orange, what comes out? Orange juice, right? And you can tell it’s an orange, because you drink it and it’s orange juice. But what happens when we get squeezed? And we’ve all been squeezed in the past month. Does...when we squeeze, what comes out? Is it anger? Is it pain? Is it judgement? What happens when we get squeezed? Or is it love? Because we are created in the image and likeness of God. And God is love. So when we get squeezed, does love come out? Or does evil come out, huh?

Again, I told you, when I was with Sister Bridge many years ago in 1990 at the worldwide retreat for priests and she was looking at all of us priests and she was saying, “Oh Fathers, you’re so holy” and she’s an Irish woman so she was preparing us to get slapped. And this Irish nun...”Oh you do all these great things, but you know, Fathers, God looks at your heart. What’s in your hearts, Fathers? Is it filled with anger? Is it filled with judgement of your Bishop? Is it filled with lust? Is it filled with judgement?” and all these other things. Every time she said another word, every one of our heads just went down. Because we’re all guilty. All of us. Everybody here is guilty. All of us. If we expect mercy from God, a mercy that restores us, how dare we not give mercy to anybody? How dare we? How dare we say horrible things without knowing all the circumstances...isn’t it amazing...everybody in this world is considered what? Innocent until PROVEN guilty. We have PROVEN people guilty without all the information, without all the things. We listen to whoever we agree with. Aagh! See? We look for things to be offended by. That is not the way of Christ. And it cannot be our way. It cannot be my way.

So what do we need to do? The second reading tells us. We need to humbly receive God's Word into our life. Let the Word of God come into our heart and transform it. To change it. To give us all heart transplants. So that we start seeing things, not the way men sees things, but the way God sees things. Because that's the kind of heart we need. And it comes from reading His Word. Not only reading His Word, but HUMBLY reading His Word. Lord, I don't know everything. I need to change. And I enter in this Word and I let Him speak to me His will. Like one woman who said horrendous things, e-mailed me after my radio show. I said, "okay, I want you, before you respond to me, is I want you to go and...I took the scripture...go and learn the meaning 'it is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice', and I want you to pray with that for seven days before you respond to me." How long do you think it took for her to respond? 10 seconds. "You're wrong, Father!" You see? People would rather prove each other wrong, then to ask the Lord what does He want? I just suggest the same thing to you and me. That whatever is bothering you the most right now, you take it to the Lord for seven days and you pray with it with His Word in silence, and then you make a pronouncement. After you've asked the Lord first.

And then He says, don't only listen to the Word, but be doers of the Word. And what does it mean to be doers of the Word? And He tells us. To take care of the orphans and the widows and then to live a life unclean...er, uh...unspotted by the world. But what comes first? Taking care of the poor. That's what the Word of God says. So is that what comes first in our life? Is the first thing in my spiritual life taking care of the poor and the needy? Or is it my moral life? Both are necessary. But according to the Word of God, taking care of the poor and needy comes first. So we all need a heart transplant, not just your pastor. Not just us people here. But everyone who's listening to us now. And so I just ask the same thing of all of us – before we are so quick to judge and make pronouncements on the whole world, and the Vicar of Chirst, we go to the Holy Word of God, we humble ourselves before Him and we ask Him, "what does He want of me?" And then we do as He asks.

Got it? Get it? Gonna live it? May each of you know His love, today and forever, Amen.