

September 16, 2018 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Fr. Larry Richards

Good Morning! And how are you?

Today we hear three words that most people don't like. I'm sure you all love them. But everybody else hates them. And I'm not really sure about of all you either or me and that is deny, cross, follow. Aren't they three great words? That we're called to deny our self. We're called to pick up our cross. And we're called to follow Jesus. In a society that likes to have it your way, go for the gusto, look for self-fulfillment, run from the cross, and follow nobody else but themselves and their wills. And now Christ is telling us something different. And so He is saying to each of us if you want to follow me, if you want to come after my steps, if you want to be my disciple this is what you must do. Now first of all, I caution you, that you don't make this a religious practice. You know a self-discipline in your life. Okay, I will deny myself. I will pick up my cross and I will follow after Jesus and it becomes a self-centered thing. Because again as we talked about a million times Christianity is never ever, ever, the focus on self but the forgetfulness of self. So we don't come to Jesus and just focus on ourselves. It's always about if I'm going to be like Jesus that means I must give away my life and love. That's what He did and that's you and I must do.

So what does love in practice look like? What love in practice looks like is someone who puts other people in front of them. That's denying ourselves even when you fast. You don't fast just for yourself so I can grow in holiness. You fast that others would come to salvation. Because remember everything that Jesus did He did for who? You and the Father. It was always other centered. Jesus did nothing for Himself. That why He denied Himself and we must deny ourselves but this denial of self must not keep us focused on ourselves.

I've been doing parish missions again, and every parish mission I tell the people at the Passion, just like I do here, but there I'm more explicit, that the average for people that haven't been to confession is 35 years, so please, those of you that have no mortal sins, those of you put other people first. Let's forget about yourself once and go to the end of the line and let the people

haven't been in the devil's grass for 35 years come first. And every single time I ask that within in the first five there's some nut that comes in, it's only been five days, I don't have mortal sin but I want the grace. And I, of course, lose it. And I start screaming and yelling and caring on you miserable selfish human being you. Because why? Their spiritual life keeps them focus on themselves. It's about me. It's about me going to heaven. That's not denying yourself. That's putting yourself first. And somewhere we got to listen to Almighty God when He tells us I want you do deny yourself. That's the first thing. Not of us like it but that's the call of Jesus.

The second call of Jesus to take up our cross. Now often we talk about of our crosses in our life. And we talk about our crosses and our life the little sufferings that come our way. And that's partly true. But what Jesus is talking about when he's telling us to pick up our cross daily he's telling us to die. To die with Him on the cross. And again on the cross nothing about Jesus. It was all about us. So when you and I go to the cross that means we live a life for God and others more explicitly. It's not just denying ourselves but it's dying. That every day my job to give up my life for other people to go to the cross. Like I said the cross is never about me. It's always about God and others. So how do I do that?

Now again, you and this parish and those who have been listening to me throughout the years, you remind yourself that explicitly. Because in your bathrooms if I was to walk into your house at this very moment and asked to use your bathroom every one of you would have on your bathroom mirror the three words: I am third! I'm so glad you all have that on your bathroom mirrors. And the three of you that don't I know you're going to run home and do it today. But it's to remind us every day to make this extremely basic. Did I do at least one unselfish act today? An unselfish act is a way of dying. One unselfish act every day. Picking up my cross. Doing something for others. That's the way I pick up my cross every day. So I deny myself it's not about me. I pick up my cross. I live that it's not about me by doing at least one unselfish act a day.

And then finally what am I called to do? What's the third word? Follow. That my whole life needs to be about following Jesus and His will. So again, the reminder for me for me to do that is when I look down and I see the chain on my wrist to remind me, my life is not mine, I am a slave of Jesus. I need

to exist today to serve Him. But it doesn't matter what I want. It only matters what Jesus wants. And I'm going to follow Him and do it His way.

How totally different that is for our society. We ask God to bless us, to give us what we want, to take care of us, and, we really, if you be explicit about it and be real about it, we're really asking Jesus to follow us or do it our way. Or to at least walk with me Jesus. But we're not just called walk with Jesus. We're called to let Him go in front and follow Jesus. Again very hard especially for somebody like me. So if there's anybody with a personality like mine that's listening they know that's a struggle too. But this is the call of God. And see when we do this why do we do this? Just so we become holy? We do this for the salvation of others? We do this to bring others to God. Because when I live this life not for myself and I live this life denying myself, it's not about me dying every day, it's about living a life of unselfishness and following Jesus seeking His will in front of mine every day, but His will always bring others to salvation. Not just to complain, not just to look at what's wrong, but to do everything in my power to bring others to salvation with Jesus Christ.

So today at this mass let's ask God for the grace that each of us will decide that the reason I exist, and if the reason I come to church is so I can learn to deny myself. To pick up my cross and to follow Jesus wherever he wants me to go.

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