

February 23, 2020 – Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. How are you? Blessed. Blessed indeed.

It wasn't part of my homily, but I remember, when I was young, my father – you've heard the story of my father many times. He was an alcoholic, died of alcoholism. He was a good man, he just had his demons. We all have our demons, and that was his. But one of the things, after I entered seminary, he thought I was wasting my life. He said, you have too many gifts to be a priest. Don't waste your life there. I want you to go be a lawyer. Oh... So, the Lord preserved us from that reality.

But one day, we got into a talk about religion, and he said, you know, I believe in the God of the Old Testament, and I said well, good. And he said, I believe in this God who told us, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Good. And he said, I believe that he sent Jesus, and Jesus was his son. But Jesus started changing the Old Testament. He started saying, instead of just an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, you are called to love your enemies. So God the Father got mad at him and had him killed. And I go, well, isn't that an interesting theology that he had. Right? And so, but see we all take theology and we mold it to our way of thinking. We take God, we take Catholicism, we take Christianity, and we say, this is the way it's supposed to be, because this is the way I think about it. But, again, we always got to let God tell us who he is, and let God tell us how to live. And that's an altogether different reality. Right? Because again, still, after I give you this homily, you are still going to go do what you want, correct? No, Father, we are going to be transformed forever by the words that speak today. Yeah, we know. Anyway, listen though to what God says: We all know, I introduced us in the beginning, to the way the gospel ends is: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect". And that makes you feel real bad because nobody here is real perfect. But then he tells us what this means. And we can go back to the Old Testament, and that one, and he says, speak to the whole Israelite community, and be holy for I am holy. So holiness and perfect is the same reality. Correct? But then he goes and talks about, what does it mean to be holy? You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove him, do not cause sin. Take no revenge. And, and this is an Old Testament thing, cherish no grudge. And there is no one here who has grudges against anyone, is there? Just a thought. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And then, of course, then we go to the gospel, and God says, you shall love your enemies. If God says, someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other one as well. And I've never like that one at all. And I always say, ok, if you strike me on my right cheek, I'm going to turn around and give you the left cheek, and you can slap that one too, and I'm going to knock you out. But, you can still, and I'll do as God said. But that's not of God either. That's the way I'd like to interpret it. I would like to take the gospel of Jesus Christ, and say, that's what Jesus said, but this is the way I'm going to live it. I'm not going to live it the way he says it, because it's not possible. And then, after he talks about that, he says love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. If you just say you are going to love the people you love, what good is that: even the pagans and the tax collectors do that? So, what God is calling us to do is to be perfect in love. To love people we can't stand. To pray for those people. You know again, yesterday, I was up in Ann Arbor Michigan, and I flew in yesterday. And we had, it's the diocese of Lansing, and it's a smaller diocese than we are. For their men's conference, 1600 men. Now, next week, we have our men's conference. And we might have 600. Hopefully, you know that first year we had 1000. But you all got to go. And while I was there, I was the first speaker,

and when the guy got up, he said, we asked Fr. Larry to be the first speaker because we want shock and awe. So, I gave shock and awe. And, then people, you got to talk to these people, because they say, "Father, are you this hard on your parishioners? They always ask, and I go, I'm harder on my parishioners! Listen to me on Sundays! They moan when I get up sometimes. But the reality was, the shock and awe I gave them was just listen - you got to love your enemies. And don't pretend to be holy if you don't love your enemies. Don't sit there, and I don't care if you go to daily Mass, if you say 100 rosaries, if you don't love you people, and love your enemies, you will go to hell forever. Do you understand that, gentlemen? And they looked at me like "I think he's nuts!" And it's true! But that's the reality. But, you know, we can't even talk about loving our enemies when we don't even love our families the way we think. We think we are all very loving. But, do you put your wife before you? Do you put your husband before you? Do you make sure, that if someone's right and someone's wrong, you are always wrong, they are always right? No you don't...shut up! The reality is we love our selves first. So, when it talks about loving enemies, if I'm not even loving my family like I need to do. Like I told the guys, your job is to die for your wife and kids. And if you're not willing to die for your wife and kids, stop calling yourself a Christian, because you're not. Ohh – they hated me. But the reality is, that God's call for us to be perfect is to be perfect in love. And, he treats all people: you know, it says, I let my son come down on both the good and the bad. So, we love people whether they agree with us or not. We love people because they are worthy of love.

And, again, if our church, if all our churches, if we sat there – like in Montreal, we were packed every night, great community in Montreal, but the church in Montreal, as I said to them fifty times, they were sick of me saying it, is dying. You have to pay to get in churches up there, because they don't have enough people. To go in one of the most beautiful basilicas in the world, you got to pay \$5. To park at St Joseph's Oratory, where I've gone every year since I was a young priest, \$5. You got to do all these things because the church is dying. Less than 3% of the French speaking Catholics go to church. 3%. Less than 10% of the English speaking people go to church. So I said, what needs to happen is the spirit of the living God got to come upon us and instead of judging the world, and telling the world how bad it is, how you got to do this to belong to us, you got to be people of love. Because if the deepest need in everyone's heart is to be loved, and if we as a church are a community that does what God commands us, love one other as I have loved you, if the spirit of the living God is inside of us, that's because we are temples of the living God, as the second reading says, then we become love in a world that doesn't know love. And then our churches would burst at the seams. Because, what we are doing, is we are meeting people in their deepest need. But sometimes, we are more concerned about being right than we care about being loving. That's my problem, I don't know if it's yours. I'm the only one here with that problem here, I know. The reality is, again, some guys comes up and says Thank you, Father, for speaking truth. Guys love when I speak truth and I get all excited about it. But then I say, ok, are you going to tell your kids that you love them and start doing that every day? I'm going to try, Father. Nope, I didn't speak enough truth today, did I? You got to do it, there's no option. If you're going to go to heaven, you got to do it. So, today, the call from God. We are called to be perfect in love. So, every day, when I wake up, what am I called to do today? Love! Love God and love other people. That's my main job. And, do it in your personality. You don't have to change your personality. We got to do it in our personality. Because God gave us our personalities. We got to get rid of the stuff, and I'm working on the stuff where I'm not loving. I'm working on it – that's all I can do. But, we got to have that call. He commands you, he commands me, to be perfect, to be holy. And he tells us what that looks like – that

we are people of love. We begin with our families, our churches, our communities, our enemies. And, when we do that, we'll be who God created us to be.

Got it? Get it? Going to do it?

May each of you know his love, today and forever. Amen.