

March 20, 2005

Palm Sunday
Fr. Larry Richards

Today, as we hear the gospel, again we'll hear the Passion again on Friday, and we will act it through on Wednesday at the Passion Talk. So, I wanted to - instead of focusing on the gospel today - since we will focus on it so much this week, I wanted to focus on the first and second readings. And if you listen to the first and second readings today, you'll see that the first reading talks about "I have set my face like flint." And then in the second reading - a beautiful reading from Philippians, which I think all of us could read every day of our lives and get more and more out of it. That is one of those readings so inspired by the Spirit - though all the scriptures are inspired by the Spirit - it really teaches us to be like Jesus, by being a slave and being obedient. So, there are three things we are going to focus on: setting our faces like flint, being a slave and being obedient. Because that's what the Crucifixion was about. To set your face like flint means that Jesus, though he was beaten, though the prophet was beaten, though everybody was against him, he stood his ground. Flint - hard- nothing is going to get past me. He stood His ground, no matter what it cost Him. Though it would cost Him His life, He stood His ground and He set His face like flint. And everything else didn't matter. He stood His ground. Two - when we see that letter in Philippians, where it said "though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at - rather He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave." That God became a slave. And somewhere, in our lives it has to be the same. You know, when I was in Boston yesterday speaking, you know, and Jim Caviezel was there - ooh - played Jesus, and you know, Tom Monahan was there and different speakers were there. It was a lot of men. It was the first time ever - they put it together in five months and they had 2,500 men show up! It was great!! But the guy who spoke before me was a guy named Jim Tohey - not any relation to Fr. Toohey, and his last name is spelled differently. But Jim Tohey is on the cabinet with the President of the United States, and a very strong catholic - five children - four boys and a baby girl. And he's in charge of the faith initiative based stuff. And so, he's talking about - he sits in the cabinet room with the President, and as he sits there, his biggest thing is "please, don't pee yourself in the middle of all these people." And so, he's a good man, and he's met men all over the world - he meets with the President, flies with the president, does all these things the president asks him - he meets all these important people around the world. But the greatest person he ever met - someone he spent two years with - was Mother Theresa. And the first time he ever met her - he says he was working for one of the senators, and he goes and he meets Mother somewhere and she says "have you been to my house for the dying?" He says "no" and she says "I want you to go and see Sister and tell her who you are, and tell her I sent you." So, he goes and after he spends his time with Mother, he goes to the House of the Dying and he asks for Sister, and Sister comes to him and she says "have you been here before?" and he says "no" waiting for the tour and she says "well, here, here is some cloth and here is some salve.

The man in bed 46 is dying - he has scabies all over him. I want you to go clean him.” And so he took this, and he’s just like “no Sister, I came for the tour.” You go and you serve Jesus. And so, this man went and this man that was dying, he cleaned the sores, all the open wounds. And he said that was the thing that changed his life. That he knew that what he was called to do was to be a slave. He didn’t ask Sister - “Hey, Sister that isn’t what I want to do.” “Hey, Sister I came for the tour.” That’s what he was thinking, he didn’t ask it. He didn’t sit there and say “Hey Sister, I work for the Government of the United States, I’m an important person.” He was a slave, and he washed and he took the wounds of a man that was dying, that just came off the streets, that was filthy, that was infected, and he served. That Jesus Christ – when we talk about the God of the Universe became a slave – that’s what it’s talking about. How we are called to be slaves of Jesus. Called to be a slave of one another. To be a slave. To lay our lives down. And then what that comes to is the next line is He is obedient. That there is no way you and I can be slaves unless we are obedient. You know, again, I want to be a slave when I want to be a slave. Is that not true? So with you. Don’t sit there and say “Oh, Father we know that.” Yes, you. Look in the mirror, we all want to be slaves when we want to be slaves. “Ok, now this will be a nice service thing for me, I’ll feel good.” You know, it’s like my kids at Prep. Oh, you have to do service, its like, “ok, what should I do? Oh, I think I’ll like this, so I’ll go do that.” That’s not being a slave. That’s making yourself feel good because you did something nice for somebody. That’s really nice. But that’s not a slave. A slave does not choose how he will serve. That’s not the slave’s job! A slave is one who is obedient to another and serves because they have been commanded. That’s a slave. Now as we enter into Holy Week, what is God calling us to do? To be slaves. Not just for Holy Week, not just for Lent. But if we are going to be His disciples for life. So what we have to do of course, as we are sitting here thinking “I get to enter into Holy Week” and all this nice stuff is you and I got to sit there and say “I’m going to have to learn, by the grace of God to set my face like flint – Boom! This is where I’ll stand.” You know, and last night when we had our St. Joseph dinner, I talked about what a day to decide to become a slave of Jesus Christ. And what a day to decide to become that on the Feast of St. Joseph. But what a day for all of us to decide ok – somewhere we have to put a line in the ground and say this is where I stand – period. And so is this where we are ready to be today, as we enter into this holiest of weeks? Are we willing to draw a line in the sand and say “This is where I stand, and I shall not be moved? From this day forward, I will be a slave of God. From this day forward, I will be obedient to the God of the Universe and to Him alone. I will serve and do what He commands, no matter what. No matter if Jesus, as He struggled today in the gospel, and He says ‘not my will, but Father you who love me and you who I love, I will obey you even unto death. Father, you who love me, and you who I love, I will obey you even unto death.’” So the call, again today on this Palm Sunday, on this Passion Sunday, is we decide to take a stand. And we say from this day forward, for the rest of my life, by the grace of God, I will be a slave, and I will obey God in all things. No matter what that costs me. Even if it costs me death.

And trust me, it will. For every one of us. And that will be every day. Because when you and I want to go and do something else, and he says “no, I want you to wash the sores of bed 46, that person there.” “Well, don’t you know I have other plans?” “You are my slave, it doesn’t matter what you want, it only matters what I want.” Shut up and do it, oh, slave of Jesus Christ. Will you be a slave for the rest of your life? That is the question. You answer that with your life, not just in your head. Oh yes, I’ll be a slave. You answer that by how you and I live every day for the rest of our life. But it begins with this is what I want God. Forever now. To set my face like flint, to become your slave by obeying you in all things all the days of my life. You got it? Good. Get it? Good! My each of you know His love, today and forever. Amen.