

April 3, 2005

Divine Mercy Sunday
Fr. Larry Richards

Today, we hear in the reading, the first reading of the Acts of the Apostles, the four early marks of the church and we have talked about this because the Bread of Life Community we always use these four marks. About whether we are truly being true to Christ or not. And the four marks of the early church was – they dedicated themselves to the...teaching of the apostles, the communal life, the breaking of the bread – Mass, and to prayers. The teaching of the apostles, the communal life, the breaking of the bread and prayers. It's interesting that the early church didn't dedicate themselves to the reading of the scriptures. Isn't that interesting? They dedicated themselves to the teaching of the apostles, which took the word of God and explained it. And of course, we had our number 1 apostle die yesterday. Huh? And, what we need to do – if anything John Paul II was - he was a teacher. He was an evangelist. And to be a good evangelist, you have to be a teacher. That means you have to tell us what to do! And if we are going to honor John Paul II, we have to listen to what he taught us, and we have to live it. Huh? That's the whole point. And he taught us, most especially in the last couple of days, when he was dying. He taught us by his example. And that's the best way, really, to teach anybody. And again, when it comes to the death of John Paul II, you sit there and even that, he had it all planned. You know how he was. But he died on Saturday, which was First Saturday and his motto for the pontificate was, Totus Tuus, which is "all yours." And it's all yours, Mary. That he had such great devotion to our lady. And so, too, if he is going to teach us, he taught us by his life. You know if anybody – who could have had a better death than he had? He had millions and millions and millions and millions, well there are over a billion –think about it – a billion Catholics. So he had at least one billion people praying for him when he was dying! A billion people! That's a happy death! Huh? And so you sit there and think about this, and he did it all because he said "all yours, Mary." So the first thing he is teaching us is what? Our Lady. Could we say the same thing here – All Yours Mary? And I like it too, because it's a slap in the face to all these people who don't believe in devotions. And you know he made his whole life the First Saturday devotion. And one of the promises of the First Saturday devotion is, when you die the First Saturday of the month, Mary is going to come get you. Guess what? Mary came and got him the First Saturday of the month! Not only that, but he waited until 8:00 or 9:00 at night to die, and when he died, he died on the vigil of Divine Mercy. And of course it was he who sat there and proclaimed the second Sunday of Easter is Divine Mercy, through the instruction Jesus to Sister Faustina, but he is the one that said it. Now, he had a lot of struggle with that, because a lot of the bishops sat there and said "oh, we don't want to do that – we don't want to put a devotion right smack in the middle of Easter." And he goes "oh, yes we do." And so now, he's going and saying "all the more, oh yes we do!" Because devotion is where we come to recognize the presence of Christ. You know, I put this picture out – and the reason I put this picture out of the Holy Father is because he is in the background. What he is doing is he is pushing forth Jesus Christ – devotion to the Eucharist – once again he proclaims devotion!! He made this

year – the last year he would be on this earth – a year dedicated to the Eucharist! We have Perpetual Adoration in our church, because our Holy Father asked us to. He is the one that sat there and said “I want Perpetual Adoration everywhere.” And so, all because of this. So what do we need to do? John Paul got his strength and he got his hope, and he got his very first thing he said, when he said to the people, when he got up there in front of everybody, when he was first made Pope. After he introduced himself, he said “do not be afraid.” And he taught us do not be afraid in how we live our lives, and how we die and what we are going to be doing in the next life! Do not be afraid. But how did he get to be not afraid? Because every morning he’d wake up at 4:00 in the morning, an hour or hours before anybody came to join him for that Mass every morning that he would have – he would be on his knees, in front of our Lord and God in the Blessed Sacrament. What Thomas proclaimed today in the gospel, John Paul II proclaimed every day of his life. “My Lord and My God” as he got on his knees. Now, isn’t it amazing – here is this man – 84 years old that spent every morning of his life on his knees before the Lord God of the Universe in the Blessed Sacrament? And so, if we are going to sit there and honor him, we just can’t sit there and say “oh, isn’t that a sad thing, sniff, sniff, the Pope died.” Shut up! What’s going to have to happen to us is we have to listen to him! We have to live what he taught us!! And what he taught us by his life is prayer - that we need to be people of prayer!! Not just prayer anywhere, but prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament! Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week in our church, we have Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament. And what made him not afraid was his daily prayer. Now, he didn’t sit there and say “ok, now I’m very tired, I have Parkinson’s Disease, I’m in my 80’s, oh my knees might hurt.” He didn’t make excuses, he just did it. And he spent time, everyday. And this man helped change the world, and I have been telling you for years as your pastor, is the way things are going to change in our hearts, in our lives, in our parish, in this Erie – is when we become men and women who spend time on our knees every day in prayer. And again, there is a big difference between praying at your home next to your bed, and praying in front of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament! A huge difference! It’s like talking to someone on the phone and being in the same bed with them! Two entirely different realities, I would imagine!!! The reality must be that we spend time with the God of the Universe in front of the Blessed Sacrament! That is how we come to know he is our Lord and our God! That’s how we come to know that ...you know, I was sitting there thinking, because I was up all night watching the thing, because I’m thinking he’s going to die and after I thought, “no, tomorrow is the Feast of Divine Mercy, he’s going to wait.” You know, so after I was up all night and I’d go in and out of falling asleep, you know, is he dead yet, is he dead yet? And I was sitting there thinking “you have to be so excited” because for 84 years he spent time before the Blessed Sacrament, or however long when he started his daily holy hour. But now, he gets to see Jesus face to face. As Thomas got to see the resurrected Jesus face to face, John Paul II yesterday got to see Jesus Christ face to face. And it’s not like he didn’t know him. Oh, he knew him, after hours upon hours in front of him. But that which gave him strength and took away his fear was being there. So we have to also look at the end of our lives. I hope you have at least started reflecting on your own death. Because we are all going to die. (Laughs) And I know every time I bring that up, which is almost every week – you all get excited about it!! But I like to keep us focused on the end, because the end is how

we are going to live. The end – it matters so much how you and I die! It matters so much, because as soon as we die – life starts beginning!

That's when true life begins. John Paul now experiences that life! That's when the resurrection happens, is when we finally can do that! So, you have to reflect on – what's it going to be when you are laying there and you are taking your last breath – and your heavy breathing thinking “will this be the last one, or will it be the next one? Am I going to die in two seconds, or am I going to die in a week?” When you are laying there on your death bed – and whenever that happens, that is going to be the most important time in your life. And so, what are you going to do to lead up so that time right there is not a scary time? I'm telling you what you need to do. You need to spend time with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. You must. You need to. That's what John Paul taught us. That prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament will now enable us to share in the resurrection of Christ. It will enable us to face death without fear. It will enable us to have the strength – you know, I was just sitting there watching for a few moments – I get irritated when I'm doing Missions and parish work at the same time – I get edgy! John Paul lived that life constantly - he didn't have two seconds – except for 4:00 in the morning till 5:00 in the morning, before the people came in to pray, to be by himself! That would drive me nuts!!! I'd be the most miserable Pope there was! But he sat there, and he did it with strength and hope and life. And what gave him that strength and what he's trying to teach us is prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. What's important is Jesus. So, what are we going to do? What you and I have to do to honor him is to make a commitment to spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Now, I can't tell you to do it every day, even though everybody here could spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament, couldn't you? And you know you could. It's a matter of priority. It's very simple. It's a matter of priority. Everybody, as they are driving back and forth, 24 hours a day, you know you could!!! Well, I don't want to challenge you to that, because you'll just get mad because I'm challenging you to something that is too strong. But I can challenge you to at least an hour a week you have to spend with Him. At least. That's the way you honor John Paul. And you don't do it for him, you do it so you'll have strength. You do it so when you come to die, you won't be afraid. You do it so when all the crazy things are happening in your life it will be ok, because you know the Lord God of the Universe. You just spend time with Him for an hour. It will change your life, it will change your family's life, it will change this parish's life. But, will you decide to do it? And you know, some of you are saying “no.” Ok, it's your life. But then, you don't honor John Paul, you don't honor him at all. What you and I have to do is come to know that he is alive, and the way we will do that is by spending time with him. Ya got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know His love, forever and ever. Amen!