

Pentecost Sunday
Sunday, May 15, 2005
Fr. Larry Richards

Let's go to the second reading from the vigil, you can use any of the readings for the Pentecost celebration, so this is the one I wanted to focus on as I was praying about where the Lord wanted me to go! So, this is where we are going. And, if you look to the second reading, this is from the Letter to the Romans. I want us to go to the second paragraph there, and pay close attention to what God is telling us here. "In the same way, the spirit who comes to the aid for our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the spirit Himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings." I want you to hear that – especially part of that. "We do not know how to pray as we ought!" We do not know how to pray as we ought! We do not know how to pray! Are there any questions? I don't care if you have been praying – you are 80 years old and you've praying for 80 years – you don't know how to pray! I don't care if you are a priest ordained 16 years and pray for an hour a day and spend all this time in front of the Blessed Sacrament – you don't know how to pray! I don't care if you are a Charismatic and you speak in tongues that no one else can understand except the Spirit of the Living God – you don't know how to pray! We gotta know where we're at! We do not know how to pray! That's very important! Because once it gets into our minds, then it will save us some pride. It will save us from thinking that if I say enough of these prayers I'm going to become holy! It will save us very being Pharisees that think that the reality of prayer is something that I do! It's not something that I do – if it is, it's nothing, and it's not prayer. Huh? You know, and again, not to use any of you as an example – I'll use myself as an example. As a priest- when I was ordained a deacon in 1988, we had to take a vow to pray the Divine Office every day. Now, the Divine Office – those who pray with us in the morning – is oh, in some ways it is basically three psalms in the morning, three psalms in the afternoon, three psalms in the evening, three psalms for the office of the readings, and one or two psalms for night pray before you go to bed. Now, and included in those psalms or readings and then intercessions and canticles or – you know, the Canticle of Mary and different things. So, since 1988, I made a vow before God that I would pray all the hours the rest of my life. Now, sometimes when I am doing this, it is exciting. But a lot of time its "oh, I have to get that hour in, ooooooh, ok" and I go and I hurry up and I go "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not....." and I say these prayers. I did not have an encounter with the Risen God. I went through the motions of being prayerful. But what God is calling us is to something deeper than that! Do you know what prayer is? You know, it's interesting that today is Pentecost and next week is what? Trinity Sunday, right? You don't go swimming in Erie on Trinity Sunday, so the lure goes. So anyway, it follows – do you know why it follows this way? Because what happens is when we surrender to the Spirit of God, prayer is about being caught up into the Trinity. It's about being caught up into the relationship of God. That's why we don't know how to pray because we try to enter this ourselves and it is impossible to enter the Trinity ourselves! We can't do it! We need to be lifted up, and the way you are lifted up is by surrendering to the Spirit! The Spirit – an image – I'm going to give you a couple of images – but let's say this is the Trinity up here – the Father always loves the Son, the Son always loves the Father, and here is this Trinity. What has to happen is the love of the Trinity needs to

come and scoop us up and take us into this. You see, it is about relationship! It's not about saying some prayers because then we'll sit there and think, "I'm good, look at the way I pray. I'm not distracted when I pray, I kneel down when I pray, I do this when I pray, I spend these many minutes, I do all this." It's not about you! It's not about me!! It's about God! Prayer is about God and us getting caught up in that relationship, huh? Last night I'm trying to – by God's grace we have grown tremendously as a parish in confession! Now when I hear confessions – start there at five to four – get done at a quarter or ten after five! So, some times though, it used to be I used to have some time between confessions. And so I didn't say my office yet – the afternoon office, so I thought, oh I'll do it in confession. So I go in and I'm sitting there and I open up – and as soon as I get in there, someone comes in! Never stopped for a second! And I'm thinking "God, I have to get my prayer in." Ya see? Do you think that has anything to do with God? No!!!!!! It had to do with me!!!! God said, "shut-up, Larry. You are here to hear confessions right now – you can pray later!" I don't want to pray later! "Shut-up, Larry! Get in there and spend time – do what I want you to do now, and do what I want you to do later! Don't do what you want to do now!" Because even in our prayer, we can make God jump through our hoop – "this is what I want, God, this is how I'm going to pray. This is the way I pray, this is the way everybody else has to pray." Shut-up!! Don't you ever say this is the way other people have to pray! Because, the way we must pray is letting the Spirit of God pray within us. So we have to pray His way, not my way. But interestingly that is going to happen! Another image is if you and I are out in the river, and the river is coming down, and we are in a row boat – if we are going against the river, and we are trying real hard in our row boat – we are going to stay right about there. And so often, that is where our prayer is. It doesn't grow – I'm faithful to it – it happens! But I am just staying there. I'm doing all this work – prayer is so hard! Oh, my! And I'm staying in the same place. Why? Because you are going against the current. You are trying to make God conform to your will. I'm trying to make God conform to my will. But what happens when the Spirit of God comes is we surrender and we go with the Spirit. We flow with the Holy Spirit. And now when we start flowing with the Holy Spirit, we can be taken up into the relationship with God. And a good way to find that out is where you and I are at in this Holy Spirit and God is when we pray, do we surrender in that prayer? Or do we fill up with some things we have to pray? That's why – if you listen – I said if you spend the hour before God, you are going to have to eventually shut up, because you are going to run out of things to say. So after you say your three rosaries, and do this – you know it is a shame if you are going to spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament and you are talking the whole hour! That was a big waste of time! Because God says "listen, excuse me, would you shut up please for awhile? Surrender to me! Get caught up into the Trinity! I want to lift you up, but I can't lift you up if all you keep doing is saying these prayers!" You have to say the prayers, yes, but that is so that you can surrender. Have you ever experienced – when you really surrender to the Spirit and you are just saying words and prayer? At this Mass, you can either be here bored, say the words, be here and leave and think "oh, that was nice, I don't know, they sang pretty good, that's nice." Or, if you and I surrender at the beginning and we get caught up and we let the Spirit say those words we are going to pray – when we just get caught up into the Spirit of God – then this Mass can be the most wonderful experience of your life, because it wasn't a ritual – you went through a bunch of rituals! It would be being caught

up into the love of the Trinity! So do you experience that? And you know, again when I am doing a Parish Mission and I'm getting on the people about the people who are leaving Mass early – I'm saying "don't even come!" Because you think that by just showing up at Mass you are doing something great for God! But you have no relationship with Jesus! If you are in relationship, you don't care if the Mass goes four hours, because you are caught up into the relationship of the God of the Trinity! You are immersed in there – you want to stay there! If you are just saying a bunch of words, you are going to want to get out as fast as possible, because the ritual is going to bore you to tears – some days you are going to like it – some days you are going to hate it, but you will be here, because you are a good person! That is not what the God of the Universe is calling us to! When He says in the beginning of that passage in Romans, He says "the Spirit helps us in our weakness!" Now, I don't know about you, but I am a weak person, and so the Spirit will help you! But you have to let Him. You have to surrender to Him. Don't you have to surrender? You going back? Have fun! Oh, sorry! You have to surrender to the Spirit! So, we have to surrender to the Holy Spirit! And so, this is what I want for the rest of the Mass. For the rest of the Mass, put everything aside. Surrender your heart to the Spirit. Really make an act of surrender, so that the rest of this Mass, we can pray, not on our power, but in our weakness, we can go with the flow of the Holy Spirit. And then when we start saying these prayers through the power of God instead of through our power, then we will be caught up for the rest of this Mass into the Trinity. And you just watch the difference that the rest of this Mass will be, if you and I surrender and just don't say a bunch of words! Ya got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen!