

**Sunday, June 19, 2005**

**Fr. Larry Richards**

Good morning!! Every time I hear a reading from Jeremiah, I want to sing “Jeremiah was a bull frog, boom, boom, boom!” Remember that song? You’re dating yourself when you start doing that stuff! Anyway, today if we spend time and focus on God’s word, and we let His word speak to us, some of us might sit there and dismiss it and because “oh, I know all about that, I’ve already dealt with that.” But I think, no, we haven’t. We all have to be immersed in it because God is constantly calling us to grow. But if we listen to the second reading, Paul is talking to the community of believers. They were already believers, like most of us are here. Not everybody, but most! And as he is preaching to them, he is reminding them the basis of salvation. And he talks about that because of the one Adam – we have all sinned. That because of the one person sinning against God, we are all born into that. We didn’t do anything to deserve it. Just like if you have both parents, and both parents have AIDS and they have a child and that child gets AIDS, the baby did nothing to deserve AIDS! But they get it because they are products of two parents are sick. Well, the same thing happens to us – we are spiritually sick and we are born into that and we call that original sin. Now, the second reading is clear about what happens here. One sinned – everybody sinned. Now, one person is redeemed – Jesus Christ – and He redeems the whole world! Again, it is because of what Jesus did – not because of what we do. Are there any questions? It is because of what Jesus did – not what we do! Now, what Jesus did is He redeemed everybody, but, it isn’t yours or mine just because – you know, how people I deal with! “Oh, I know God loves me.” Well, God loves the devil too! You know that? He has never stopped loving Satan! Just being known that you are loved by God doesn’t mean squat! It doesn’t mean you are saved! It doesn’t mean you are going to heaven! Just because you are loved by God – Whoop-tee-do! Just by creation, we are loved by God. But, last night we celebrated in this church – 35 years of marriage between Bill and Nancy Smith! Now, as I was talking about these two getting married – one day, Bill who loved Nancy, looked at Nancy, took her hand and offered her a ring, and said “Nancy, would you marry me?” Now, two things had to happen for that to become real! Nancy had to accept that ring, say yes, and then respond with her life. Bill’s love means nothing unless she accepts it and responds to it. The same is true with our relationship with God. God loves - he did everything for us - but we need to accept that love and then respond to that love by being in this covenant relationship -by marrying God! So, now what has to happen is that we do that! Now, most of us here have done that in some degree. But even as I preached to the priests this week – you know I preach real basic, even to priests – because we all need the basics. You know, when you are talking about priests, and I’m sitting there telling these guys “gentlemen, if you don’t say daily Mass, you don’t have belief in the real presence. I don’t care if you are a priest or not.” And they look at you like “where did this guy come from?” But the reality is the same with us!

Sometimes we think “just because I go to church – just because I raise my hands up – just because I get excited at church – that I am really in this covenant relationship with Jesus.” So the first thing we have to think about ourselves is have we truly, personally, fully accepted the gift of redemption – that Jesus did on the cross. Have we truly looked at Him and said “Jesus, what you did on the cross, I accept for me.” Even if you were baptized – the church accepted it for you, but you have to open it! You have to personally say “Jesus, I want what you did for me at Calvary.” And then, even that is not enough, is it? If Nancy just took the ring off of Bill and said “I got a ring, this is pretty nice” and did not respond, they would not have been celebrating 35 years of marriage! What it cost Nancy to receive that ring was the response of her life. It’s just not enough to receive what Jesus did for you at Calvary. You must respond – I must respond – by entering into this relationship with Jesus that will cost you and me our lives! Not part of our lives – not a little part on Sunday – not “oh, this is my salvation!” Your whole life! My whole life!! Completely His, 100% holding nothing back! And it has to be a public thing. Just like Nancy and Bill enter into a public marriage, so must our relationship be public before all eternity and be complete in our response. Now, God will never force this on anybody – because it is a free choice! He doesn’t automatically accept you – you have to respond and give Him your life – and if we do this, then He says “if you before the world accept me, then I will accept you and own you in front of my heavenly Father.” “But if you deny me” – he says today in the gospel, then He says “I will deny you before my Father.” So you see how public that has to be? And sometimes we might privately accept Jesus, but then before others, you know when I’m at work or I’m doing things, I’m embarrassed by Jesus and so I publicly deny Him in some way. Then He says that “I will publicly before My Father, when you stand before Him, I will deny you, because you have denied Me. I will give you what you want and what you wanted wasn’t Me.” So, where are we at with this relationship with Jesus Christ? First, have we accepted that which He did for us at Calvary for ourselves? If no, don’t you leave this church today without fully accepting that and saying “Jesus, I accept what you did for me on Calvary.” And if we have done that, have we responded with the gift to Him of our life? Am I truly “married” to Jesus Christ? Am I in this relationship that cost me my life and nothing else makes sense in my life apart from Jesus Christ? Can you and I really say that nothing else makes sense in my life apart from Jesus Christ? Work, family, sex, everything! Nothing makes sense in my life if Jesus is not the center of it. Because if we are not there yet, guess where He wants you and me to be? There! So, the second part then today is that we have to look at the Lord and say “Jesus, I give you completely my life. I want to enter into this relationship with you which will change me.” Now, you have to know too, that Jesus Christ did not come into this world to give us more rules, now did He? Now, some people think it is about obeying the rules. It’s not about obeying the rules! Christ came to free us from the law! And what He also did is that He came to change our hearts! And again, if you listen to the tapes by Chris West, he uses the example about a man and a woman who were married. Now, like last night with Bill and Nancy. I looked at Bill and I said “Bill, someone doesn’t have to make a law, huh? You cannot murder your wife. Does someone have to make that a law?” “No, Father.” Why? Because you’d never want to kill your wife, now would you?

So, your heart is changed and you are so much in love that Bill, you no longer need the law that you cannot kill your wife, Nancy. What must happen to us is that our hearts are so on fire with love of Jesus, that we no longer need a law. Like for someone who is in love with Jesus Christ, you don't need the reality "you must go to Mass on Sunday!" If you still need the law to go to Mass on Sunday, guess what? You are not in a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are in relationship with Jesus Christ, it's not like "oh, I have to go to Mass on Sunday." It's "Jesus I want to go to Mass everyday of my life, but I can't but I want to! Jesus, you're the one that's more important to me! I would never call a church and say 'do I have to go to Mass on this holy day?'" If you are still in that thing – then you are not in a relationship! You're still in the law! You're still under the law! And the law is necessary for those who aren't in love. But if you are in love, the law is no longer necessary. So, in your heart of hearts, do you need the law, or are you in love? And if you are still in the law, acknowledge it, know it and say "Jesus, help me to go way beyond the law, so that I may respond to you in love." And then the law will seem so superficial – not enough, because the law demands the minimum – love fully, freely gives the maximum. Law demands a part of my life, one hour a week. Love demands the fullness of my life, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So, are you living by the law, or are living in love? If you and I aren't living in love, let's ask the Lord Jesus to change our hearts before we leave this church today, and you know He will. If you ask, and if you mean it. May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen!