

October 9, 2005

Fr. Larry Richards

Today, as we listen to the first reading, the first reading is usually used for funerals, and it is a powerful reading – we will be focusing on the second one. But I want to deal with just one line in the first reading, and that is where it says “God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” And again, years ago when I was at Our Lady of Peace, it will be 17 years I was ordained a deacon this week – and 17 years ago when I while I was a deacon and priest over there, you know we had a big school of course and there was a girl in the 8th grade that wanted to commit suicide because she was being picked on. You know, even in Catholic schools we sometimes forget what is the most important thing is that we love each other, but anyway that is what happened. So then she graduated and she went on and was in my youth group – in fact met her husband later in my youth group, but she went to McDowell High School. And while she was at McDowell she was still – she was not like everyone else – people picked on her and made fun of her. And so, she was sitting in the cafeteria one day, and as she sat in the cafeteria, an older upper classman went over to her, because she was crying. And he went up to her and he took one of her tears and he wiped it away and he said “Jesus himself wants to wipe away all of your tears.” And she entered into this relationship with Jesus Christ. The ritual of going to church was no longer that important to her – have mercy on us all. Later on, she met her husband. Later on she left the Catholic Church. Later on her husband became a Baptist minister and the two of them are quite happy as Baptists. But the point of the story is not that you better leave the Catholic Church – I’ll hurt you! The point of the story is that for our faith to become real, it has to be more than a ritual. It has to be a relationship. And it became real to her that even though she was in the Catholic Church, she went and every day and learned religion and everything else - Jesus did not become real to her until someone went up to her – touched her and said “Jesus himself wants to wipe away every one of your tears.” So here at a public high school another high school kid brought someone else to know Jesus Christ by reaching out and talking about Him and not talking about themselves or not talking about you know, don’t worry, you’ll get over it, everything will get better – no – forget about all that refuge. It is all about entering into Jesus – only Jesus can wipe away our tears. And we need to invite people to that. But first, if we listen to the second reading, I mean there is so much in the second reading. Here it goes, and of course it is from Philippians. And listen to this – He says “brothers and sisters, I know how to live with abundance in every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need.” Paul says “listen, I know the secret of how you can deal with anything in your life – abundance, poverty, riches...I’m going to tell you how.” And what is the secret? “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” “I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.” That is the secret. And you know, everyone of us, when we come to church – you know we are either tired, or we are struggling with our faith, or struggling with our family, they are not perfect, can you imagine? Or we are struggling with people at work, or we are struggling with relationships, or we are struggling with fear, or we are struggling with something! And we come to church looking for hope – looking for strength to get through it.

And Paul tells us today “I’m going to tell you the secret how to deal with all of this! Don’t deal with it yourself! You can’t. Let Jesus be your strength!” Get your strength from Him. Huh? And that is the only thing that can happen. It is the only thing that keeps me together. On Friday, I had First Friday calls, Mass in the morning, prayer in the morning, middle of the night, First Friday calls, had to run to Corry at 11 AM – do a funeral in Corry, then had to run to Pittsburgh at 3 PM – did a wedding in Pittsburgh – sat there, dealt with my Mom – “hi, mom, bye mom, see ya mom,” came back, had guests here, got up Saturday, had a wedding, had Mass, confessions, then had to go and deal with people, have all the Masses today, have two baptisms after Mass, then we have a TEC meeting, then I have to go to the funeral home because tomorrow we have a funeral – BLAAAAAAAA! Then the Lord says “shut up, you don’t do it under your power – you do it under mine!” And sometimes I’m thinking you better get it under way and hurry it up Lord, because I’m tired! But the reality is He sits there and says “I’m going to give you the secret Larry – stop doing it yourself!” And that is where the gospel comes in. I don’t know if you got what the gospel is about. Here is the king, this is the parable about heaven and God the Father has a feast at the end of time, and He invites everybody. Huh, he started with the Jews! And the feast is a wedding party for His Son who is Jesus, and the Church – His Bride. And He invites the people – they reject Him and they are too busy, or whatever it is. And then they kill some of the prophets, those loud mouth prophets tell them things they don’t want to hear, so big Barney goes and he destroys them – kills them and burns their cities down. And then He says, “come here, I want everybody...” and He invites everybody, and when everybody comes, He goes through them to meet everybody and there is one person not dressed, and he throws him out. Now, what is it to be dressed? Again, for this we go to the Book of Revelations, and the bridal garment is what John sees when he is Heaven, and John looks at the angel and says “who are all those people all dressed in white? That is the bridal garment.” And what is the answer? They are the ones who have washed themselves clean in the blood of the lamb. So, what needs to happen is it is not just a ritual, it is not just going to church, it is entering into this relationship with Jesus who wants to wipe away our tears. It is letting Him be strong – it is letting Him take us and wash us in His blood – it is staying in the blood of Jesus Christ. And it is saying “Lord, I can’t deal with these things, but you can. You do it Lord.” When you are in the midst of struggling with your family – you have to be still. “I can’t Lord, but you can. May I have your strength? Do it through me Jesus.” When you are struggling with your faith, instead of this intellectual garbage we go through in trying to understand and grasp everything, “Lord, I trust in you.” When you are struggling with the people at work, stop, be still. “Lord, give me your strength to love these people. Lord, give me your strength to not judge these people. Lord, love them through me.” You see, what it is when we finally give it all to Jesus, is we let Him live His life through us, as I have said a thousand times. But too many of us still are trying to do it wearing our own clothes. We go to the banquet wearing our own clothes. Wearing our own clothes is trying to live the Christian life under our own power! We can’t do it! And until we finally get that through and till your pastor gets it through your head – I can’t do it! And I don’t have to, and neither do you. He wants to do it through us. But we have to let Him. We have to surrender. We have to say “Jesus, it is your strength, it is not my power.

It is not because I am smart, it is not because I am athletic, it is not because I make a lot of money, and it is not because I'm very whatever by the world – I can't Lord. And He says "I know." This is the secret – "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I can't do it through myself. And that is what you and I have to learn. And of course, it begins everyday anew. It begins today when you in this church sit there and say "ok, Lord, you have charge and control of every part of my life. I am not strong enough. You Lord are." And then we wash ourselves in the blood of Christ. Renew ourselves. We come in this white garment. Lord, live your life through me, because I can't. If we do that, then we will live forever. Forever and ever, but heaven will begin now, when you and I let Jesus live His life through us. It is about a relationship – it is not about going through the motions. May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.