

Fr. Larry Richards
Midnight Mass
December 24, 2005

Christmas is one of the hardest things to preach on, because it is the same thing every year, and as I was meditating today, doing my holy hour in the chapel – the chapel is beautiful for Christmas, if you haven't been over there, get over there! But as I was meditating on the whole reality, I was thinking of Joseph, and you know, when we deal with Jesus, Jesus of course is God, so that is nice. When we deal with Mary – Mary was conceived without original sin, well that's nice. But then we deal with Joseph, Joseph was like us in all things, including sin. He was a man – he doubted. He was going to divorce Mary. He did all these things – he was just like us! You know, so often we make a nice statue and we go “oh, he is just so perfect” and we look at Augustine, Augustine who had sex outside of marriage, which is next to Joseph, Augustine who used to say “Lord, make pure, but not yet...”, all these guys were all real human beings who struggled, who sinned, and that is why Jesus Christ came. Tonight, earlier at the 5:15 Mass because, packed house, of course, the pagan mass, and everybody comes just to get it over with. And there are people there who have not been to church in forever, chew gum. But anyway, in the midst of it, one of my kids was there from Prep, and I was his Confirmation sponsor and he just went on. And so, I grabbed him, because I knew he hadn't been to church since he went to college and I went back and I said – and I heard confessions before Mass like I did here – and I said “son, come on, its confession time.” Him and his brother... “come to confession so you can go to communion tonight.” And they both looked at me and said “uh uh.” And I said “Ah Huh.” And I said “come on, right now.” And then I went in the confessional and sat there and neither of them came – they just sat there. And so after Mass they came and gave me a hug and I said “you broke my heart tonight.” Because Jesus Christ offered them His forgiveness, His salvation and they rejected it on Christmas, but they still went to communion, of course. They didn't get it. You see, most people who go to Mass at Christmas don't have a clue – they are just here because that's what good people do for Christmas! NO!!!!!! It is about everything else. Joseph, when he was there with Jesus received forgiveness. And so when you and I come to Jesus Christ tonight you can either be here because of a ritual – here I am, it's Midnight Mass – good people go to Midnight Mass – but Jesus Christ tonight – from the altar – from the stable offers to you mercy, forgiveness, love, but will you receive it? The first one that touched the God of the Universe was Joseph. The first one to touch Him as He came out of Mary was Joseph, and so the first thing that St. Joseph did was receive. The first thing that you have to do tonight on this Midnight Christmas Eve is receive – receive His love. Because again, the devil believes that God loves him – Oooh! You might come here and – oh, I believe God loves me! So what! Oh, I'm impressed. You believe God loves you! Oooh! Have you received His love? Have you accepted that love? What that love will cost you is the same thing it cost Joseph – It cost him his life! If you think you can receive God's love by going to church every once in awhile – I don't care if go every day – I don't care if you go every week! It's not enough! It's a ritual if you have not yet first received His love. Accepted it as Joseph did. He knew when he was to name Him Jesus – He would be named Jesus to save His people from their sins. And the first one who wanted to receive that forgiveness was Joseph.

How about you, tonight, right now? Will you receive what He wants to give you? Will you receive what He wants to give you? Will you receive His love, or will this just be something you do? Tonight, will you receive as Joseph did? Was He born to save you from your sins? First question. Think about it. Second thing. After Joseph received everything Jesus wanted to give him by touching Him for the first time – the first person to touch Him – Joseph gave to Jesus his life. He gave Him the greatest of all gifts – the thing that he had most – the only thing Joseph truly had was his life – and he gave his life in service. The rest of his life, Joseph had one purpose in life – to serve, to protect, to take care of and to love his son. After you have received from Jesus, now it is not enough, because love on one side, just receiving it is not enough. Those of you who are married, or those of you who are young who have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, if all you do is love them and they don't love you back – you are not going to stay in that relationship very long, now are you? Why do you expect that from Jesus? Why, if you would not receive – if you love somebody, your boyfriend, your girlfriend – and they didn't love you back – they didn't want to spend time with you – why would you not want to stay in that relationship? And you know you wouldn't. You know you'd say "I love this person – I do all these things for this person – and the person never returns it to me." You'd be out of that relationship in about 2 seconds! And yet, we are constantly in this relationship with Jesus, where He gives and He gives and He gives and we wave at Him every once in awhile, and we say "Jesus, I need you, help me right now." But what we need to do on His birthday is to give Him our life. To enter into this relationship with Him so intimately that could you say then, beginning tonight, that you have one purpose for the rest of your life? To serve Him, to love Him, to give your life for Him. You know, way too many people are "culturally Catholic" or "culturally Christian." "I just believe that stuff and it's nice." But you are not Christian or Catholic unless it costs you your life. It is not just fanatics. This is about a relationship. Joseph entered into relationship with his son, and it cost him his life. If you and I tonight are going to truly enter into relationship and receive the love of God, then we must return and give back life, and that will cost you and me our life. So the second question: are you willing tonight to let from this moment forth, the rest of your life have one purpose – to love Him, to serve Him, to give your life for Him – when you ask Joseph – "Joseph, what is your one concern in life?" "To take care of my son and His mother." If I ask you tonight, "what is your one purpose in life?" Would it be to serve that Son? To take care of Him? To give your life for Him? The third thing that we must do is abide with Him. When Joseph received the love and the forgiveness of God and he gave his life – he lived that life abiding with Jesus for the rest of his life. So, tonight after Communion, I will give everybody a chance to kneel before the God of the Universe, and to give your life to Him. Now, for Billy Graham, that is enough. You just do it once, you come up to an altar call, and you can go home and have a fine time. It wasn't enough for Joseph. The rest of Joseph's life, he abided with Jesus, and he was with Jesus every day of his life. You know why? So that he could be with Jesus – forever. Where is St. Joseph now? With Jesus. And the reason he is is because his whole life, he spent with Jesus and when he stood before God the Father, and he said what do you want more than anything else? I want to be with Jesus. Come into Heaven! If you were to drop dead tonight – right there! You just died and God looked at you and said "what do you want more than anything else – would it be to abide with Jesus? "Father, more than anything else – I just want to be with Jesus." Because that is what Christmas is about! So,

good St. Joseph, who is our patron, who was like us in all things, even sin, give us a great example of what Christmas must mean for us. That we receive the God of the Universe, to receive His love, His mercy and His forgiveness – that this night and all the days of our lives, we give Him back our love. We truly enter into relationship and that for the rest of our lives, we abide with Him. That means we spend quality time with Him in prayer every day – so that when the time comes and you and I stand before the God of the Universe and he says “what do you want more than anything else?” And you and I say “the same thing I wanted all the days of my life – just to be with Jesus.” If you do that tonight, and every day of your life – a billion years from now we are going to be together, with Jesus. When you give Him everything, He gives you everything. It is a no lose situation when you give Him everything. If you give Him nothing – you lose everything. It’s your decision. You got it? Get it? You hate me, don’t you? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen!