

January 1, 2006

Fr. Larry Richards

And I go back to the first year I was ordained a priest and I was first ordained at Our Lady of Peace, and then I was sent off into the diocese and I spent one week less than a year in another part of the diocese – a very cold part. And while I was there, you know, newly ordained, on fire for God. And I am one of the ones whose fire for the Lord has increased from ordination, not got less. I love being a priest more today than when I first got ordained! But when I was newly ordained and was the assistant at this parish, on the Feast of today, our Mother of God, I went to the people like I did today at Mass and said “the first thing we are going to do is start the year off right, and we are going to say the rosary and put ourselves under the care of Mary, as Jesus did with His birth.” So, we all knelt down and said the rosary together. Well, my pastor at that time hated the rosary, hated the Blessed Mother, hated the pope – he used to get up and say “there is no hope in the pope!” He used to get up and say “no one ever got anything by saying the rosary.” And I used to get up and say “don’t listen to the pastor!” But, anyway, so, this is the way it was, and so after I went and did this the one day, well three weeks later, we had parish council, and I couldn’t be there. And so, parish council members went to the pastor and said “you know, pastor that was a great thing Fr. Larry did on January 1st.” And he said “oh, what did Fr. Larry do?” “He said the rosary with everybody before Mass on the Feast of the Mother of God.” Well, he went nuts!! I sat there on my day off, came back to hear confessions on a Saturday and on my way up to the third floor, which I lived, I sat there and I had a letter from him. And it was “Dear Larry,” and this is an exact quote from the letter, I have it memorized! “It came to my attention that on January 1st, 1990, you said the rosary with people before Mass. You will refrain from such outbursts of piety in my parish!” Then it went on to say “this parish is to be in ‘my image and likeness’ – you wait until you get your own parish before doing such things.” Well, this wasn’t a good thing – because this was way before the anger management classes! Sixteen years before I had any anger management classes!!! So, I’ll just let it go at that! But we were arguing over our Mother of God. And I can still to this day – it drives me completely crazy – he has since come to conversion and has an altogether different thing – please God, about our Blessed Mother. But the reality is that everything begins with Mary! The Church begins with Mary – God begins with Mary – everything started with Mary’s “yes”! The new Eve. Just like sin began with Eve – sorry ladies, it did – her going and saying yes to the devil and bringing it in – it says in scripture that all sin began with Eve. Now all salvation begins with the New Eve – The Blessed Mother of God. So there are two things that I want to focus on today. First is Marian Devotion and the second is Mary as our one we need to imitate. First is Marian Devotion. Marian Devotion – if we don’t have devotion to Mary...I say it again and again – we can’t truly be followers of Christ, because the last thing He gave us was His mother! And if God who is the creator of the universe, by His will needed Mary – so must we. So first thing, for those of you who don’t have devotion to Mary – I’m your pastor – I’m here to get you to heaven – I’m telling you what you must do. And you in obedience must do it, right? You have to say the rosary every day for this New Year. It is not an option. If you don’t do it, you need to confess disobedience! I’m telling you, you have to say the rosary every day! Because if

the Mother of God comes down from heaven and says “say the rosary every day” I, who is her priest, am going to tell you just as she said. So the first thing I want you to do is say the rosary every day. Now when you say the rosary every day, you make sure you don’t just say it to get it in because you want to get all your prayers in. When you say the rosary, you pray with our mother, not to our mother. And she takes you by the hand and she says “come here, I want you to know my son. And the more you meditate on His life, the more you will become like Him.” And so Mary takes you by the hand, and as you sit there and you reflect on the birth of Jesus, like we talked about before, in the midst of you meditating on the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Mary looks at you and says “here, you want to hold Him?” And then, while you are saying the rosary, while you are meditating, Mary puts the God of the Universe in your arms, and you sit there and you hold and you rock Jesus for awhile. Then you become like Him, then you will become like Mary, the true first disciple. So, first thing I want you to do in this New Year is make sure you say the rosary every, single day. If you need a rosary, you stop by – we will get you a rosary – we have plenty! But you have to make that your first thing, because Father said! Not because Father said, because who said? Mary said! Thank you! So those of you, it is going to hurt to do this, but good – I want you to do it, especially those who struggle with Mary. You must. Second thing is beyond devotion, she needs to be imitated! And the first way we see this imitation is when Mary says yes to the will of God. We talked about St. Joseph last week, but now we have to focus on Mary this week, and Mary, when confronted with God’s will – she put everything aside and said “it doesn’t matter what I want – it only matters what God wants.” And so, here it is this New Year, and you have made resolutions, I’m sure some of you, that is very nice. What does God want of you this year? Put them aside and sit there and say, “I need to lose 10 pounds, or I need to this, or I need to do that.” My big thing with me is – my thing that gets me into the most trouble is what? My mouth! And I was talking with Fr. Nick the other day and I said “I think I’m going to take a vow of silence.” Because, every single time I open my mouth, something stupid comes out!” “Yea, I know Larry!” “Shut up! Don’t say that to me!” Anyway, but the reality is – it is! And it is the same thing I most blessed with. So I come before the Lord last night when I was praying and I said “what do you want me to get a hold of this year, Father, God of the Universe?” “Your mouth.” Ok, so what does God want me to do? And so what I have to do is come before the Lord and say “Lord, whatever you want in my daily life.” First example of Mary is to put our desires away and say “Lord, I am here to only do what you want.” The second thing is we listen today in the gospel. The gospel here – it is one of these beautiful things and it says “Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” Mary was the original contemplator. She was the first “nun” if you will, who was a mediator who contemplated on all the life of Jesus, because it says here “Mary heard and was amazed at was told to her by the disciples. Mary kept these things and reflected on them.” That is again what the rosary is – we contemplate and reflect on the life of Jesus. She was told what the shepherd said, and then she took that to here heart and she meditated on that. If you want to become holy, you meditate on the life of Christ. And that is what we do when we pray the rosary – you meditate on the scriptures. That is what we do – we meditate on how Jesus is part of my life every day of my life. So the first thing we do is put our will aside and say “your will be done, not mine.” The second thing Mary shows us is we need to be contemplatives. We need to be people who pray, who meditate on the life of Christ. But

then comes the third thing. The third thing we see in the Magnificat. That right after Mary was told that she would be the Mother of God...you know, it is a great thing here in the Magnificat, Mary is told in Luke, Chapter 1 that she will be the Mother of God. And what does she do? She goes before Elizabeth, and Elizabeth in Chapter 1, vs. 39-40 it says "she made haste to Elizabeth." She made haste. And then this one line in here says, vs. 56 "Mary remained with Elizabeth about 3 months, and then she returned home." That Mary did not just focus on herself – before I came over here today, I ran next door to get something in my office, and I see one of our new deacons, who will be nameless, but anyway, going to be a priest soon, but he will be nameless! And I said "where are you supposed to be?" He said "I'm going into the chapel, that's the best place in the world to be!" I said, "Oh yes, as long as that's not the only place you go!" "Oh, shut up Father," he says, "that's the best place in the world to go!" And I said "So and so, you can spend your whole day there and go to hell!" "Absolutely not, Father!" I said "absolutely" – it's my mouth, right? And we get into this debate over there before I come running over to church! And I said "if it's God's will for you to take care of the poor, and you are spending all of your time in front of the Blessed Sacrament, I'm telling you, you will go to hell!" He says "Father, you are getting rid of the value of prayer." I said "no I am not. When you go and you spend time in prayer – what is the biggest part of prayer I have told you a thousand times – it is to listen! And so, if you go there, I promise you He is going to tell you to get up and to serve! Mary, who had the tabernacle of God inside of her didn't say – and she is the one that could have done it more than any of us - "I have God inside of me – I have to take care of myself first." Oh this is the greatest theology and spirituality and crap that comes into the world nowadays!!! "I have to take care of myself first!" She could have said "I have God inside of me" – if anybody ever deserved to sit at home and do nothing – and take care of herself, it was Mary. But what did Mary do? She got up and she served three months out of the nine months – she served and put other people in front of her. If you and I are going to follow the example of Mary the Mother of God, you just can't sit there and say "oh, I have to take care of me first, because God dwells within me." Nice. How are you and I going to serve? You see, it is not either or, it is both. And we come before God and say "God, the only thing that I want is what you want." And then we meditate, we reflect on the life of God, we spend time in His presence, and then, we serve. You need all of it to truly be a disciple. So here we have a brand new year in front of us. God doesn't just want us to go out and serve – He wants us to meditate too and pray. He wants us to spend time with Him. He wants us to spend time with His mother, because Jesus in His humanity was taught everything He knew in His humanity, by His mother. And if Jesus, who was God, needed Mary, who of us has that great pride to think we don't? Got it? Get it? You going to do it? Promise? Good! May each of you know His love, and Mary's, today and forever. Amen.