

Easter Vigil
April 15, 2006
Fr. Larry Richards

I don't know if they told you, but this is the longest Mass of the year! You're going to be here for six hours...well, I'm going to preach at least three, so you figure it...ha, ha! Then Fr. Bill is going to make breakfast...it's a great thing! Isn't it great to have Fr. Bill with us tonight? Ok, I love the second reading. It is so much to talk about what it is to be resurrected with Christ. Because this is what we are going to be talking about! His Death-my death – our resurrection. His death – my death – our resurrection. So, as we dealt with Good Friday, and we dealt with the death of Jesus Christ the other day, we know that when Christ died – he died for all of us. That's what it is! That's redemption. Christ redeemed the world when He died. But we have to die with Him. And that's what happens tonight – tonight Andrea...look, isn't she excited! Andrea – we get to kill her tonight! Did you know that? Well, you're gonna die! Get excited! And so, we are going to kill Andrea tonight, in front of everybody – its going to be a wonderful thing! And what she is going to do is her death or my death is going to be incorporated to the death of Jesus Christ – she dies with Christ – is that not what the first line of the Epistle talks about? Isn't it? Look at that.... “Brothers and sisters, are you aware that we who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” So this is what happens to Andrea tonight, but just not Andrea, but to ALL of us! That what happens the day we got baptized, we went to the cross of Jesus Christ. Isn't it interesting, we are talking about the resurrection, but we are starting with the cross? That – do you not realize that we who are baptized are baptized into Christ's death? Because we have to get this – it is so amazing that when Christ died...this is what happens. Jesus who was God, died on the cross, and for Him to come back to life, God the Father took the dead body of His Son, and embraced it. Remember, as I told you on Good Friday – yesterday I said I want you to hold the dead body of Jesus for the next 24 hours. I want you to hold Him as Mary did. I want you to be there at the foot of Calvary and just hold onto the dead body of Jesus and rock Him back and forth. And then I said I want you to hold Him so close, tighter and tighter and tighter until you and Jesus become one – until your blood, the blood that flowed from Jesus side – the blood and water - until your blood and His blood become one. Because also, who held Jesus, if you look at the cross up here...there is God the Father holding the dead body of His Son. And this is what happens theologically – God the Father holds the dead body of His Son and assumes the dead body of His Son so much that His love is greater than death. And as He embraces His Son, His love brings Jesus Christ everlasting life! It is the life of God – the breathing within Him – that death cannot conquer! “Love is stronger than death” the Old Testament says! This proves it! The Father's love for Jesus Christ is stronger than death! So, what happens is the day we get baptized, we go to there! Right in the center of the cross where Jesus is being held by the Father – we become one with Jesus Christ at baptism, as Andrea is going to do today, and we die with Him. And just as love brought Jesus back to life – it is the same love of God the Father that brings us life. And for God the Father – once we become baptized into the death of Jesus, for God the Father to let us go – He has to let go of Jesus. Do you get that? For God the Father to let us go – He has to let go of Jesus. And God the Father

will never let go of Jesus. And so as long as we keep going to Jesus – as long as Jesus and I are one – as long as His death and then later my death when I am baptized become one – for God the Father to let me go – He has to let go of Jesus. Now, Fr. Mike did TEC with me this past weekend – Fr. Mike DeMartinis and he used a beautiful analogy, and he said “how many of you would sit there if you had the power, if you lost your son or your daughter, mother or father, husband or wife – would let you son or daughter, mother or father, husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend rot in the ground?” Just the thought of it would sicken you – just the thought of that would sicken you to see someone rot! How much more for God the Father? See, God the Father can’t see that with us – that once we are incorporated in Jesus and we become the sons and daughters of the Father, He will never let us go. You see what it is all about Jesus for? Because when Jesus and I are one – as Andrea becomes one with Jesus tonight – God the Father will never let her go as long as she stays in Jesus Christ. And that must be with all of us – as long as we stay within Jesus Christ. So, Jesus died, we died with Him – His death, my death, our resurrection. I talked a couple of weeks ago at an all boy’s school, and I gave my Passion Talk. And you know, it is all boys – 8:20 in the morning on a Monday morning and they have to listen to me give an hour and a half talk on the Passion of Jesus Christ. And you know, they are all kind of like this....and as the Passion Talk went on they got more into it and then as we went through the Examination to get them ready for Confession, and I said to them “are you afraid of dying?” And all the kids – yea – these are high school kids – they are afraid of dying! I said “you don’t have to be. You don’t have to be!” And so, one of the kids came to me after and he said “Father, I am petrified of dying. Tell me how not to be.” And I said “Son, I am going to tell you how not to be afraid of death. You get to know Jesus. You spend time with Jesus every day. And the more you spend time in the arms of Jesus, the more...” And you see what happens is when you and I spend time in prayer with Jesus Christ, Jesus and us become more one. And the more time you and I spend with Him, the less we are afraid of death because we know what is on the other side! Because you see, get this – again you have to listen to the readings, not jus read them and go “Oh, my gosh after four readings, I don’t want to listen to any more of this reading!” As Paul is reflecting, he says “For if we have grown into union with Him through a death like His...” and that means so that every day when you and I are dying to ourselves, everyday... if you and I learn to die to ourselves every day in our time, then when the time comes where we finally reach our last day...today, I was called out about 12 Noon today to anoint someone who was dying. And as I was getting them ready to die – a young person not much older than me – I was getting them ready to die – I said I am here to give you everlasting life! You see, that which we are most afraid of – there isn’t a person in this place that isn’t afraid of dying! There isn’t a person in this place that isn’t afraid of dying! That if I was to tell you that you were going to be dead in one hour, you’d be like “OHHHHHH!” But the more time you spend with Jesus, the less fear you will have. The less time you spend with Jesus, the more fear you will have. Because when you spend time with Jesus, you already start living on this earth resurrection. You see, what Paul says here isn’t that you resurrect later on after we die – is that what he says? He says we get to be absolved from sin, that our sinful body will no longer be a slavery to sin – if we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him. We know that Christ, who rose from the dead is “death no longer has power over Him. Now, consequently, you must think of yourselves as being dead to sin, but living...” not wait

until later until you die – “living in Christ Jesus, the Lord.” So, what does this mean? That the more you and I spend time in the presence of Jesus Christ, then I come to know that He is alive. And then I come to know that when I finally take my last breath, I have died every day of my life – it is just another dying. And in the midst of that, I come to know that I already lived the resurrection because in Galatians 2:19...if you don't know this by now, you might as well just shoot yourselves... “I have been crucified with Christ.” He died – I died! “I have been crucified with Christ. So, the life I live is no longer mine!” So, today Andrea dies, and the life she lives is no longer hers! What happens? Jesus Christ lives inside of me. I still live my human life, yes, but it is a life of faith and the Son of God who loved me and gave His life for me. So, just as with Andrea tonight, so it is with all of us! So, what must happen for the resurrection to be alive for us? You and I spend time in His arms every day. So, just like the other day, I asked you to spend time holding the dead body of Jesus - this is what I want you to do for Easter. I want you to let yourself be held by the living Jesus. And as you and Jesus – as you come to know Jesus, let Him give His life to you! Let Him live inside of you so really that you no longer live...you see, so often Christians, especially Catholics – I don't get us sometimes – we walk around with these pusses on our faces, don't we? Your pastor does it most of the time – Urrrr.....and we walk around with theses pusses and we think.... I was just sitting there thinking the other day, because I was watching EWTN and I was thinking “we look like the deadest of all people! Did you ever watch a Mass on EWTN? This is for all those who are very excited with EWTN and think I'm a pagan! Watch a Mass on EWTN ... if anybody smiled, including the priest, you know “the Lord be with you...” “And also with you.” Then they say something in Latin, which I don't understand...Fr. Bill knows Latin, so he gets it! But – and everybody is there and you think “oh, let me run down and become a Catholic today!” Where is the life? That's what I want to know! Where is the life? Why is our Catholic Church sometimes so dead that we are not alive in Jesus Christ? Why? I'll tell you why! Because we are still trying to live the Christian life ourselves. We are still trying to go through the motions! We are still trying to let the ritual save us! The ritual will not save us! Going through the motions will not save us! The only thing that is going to save us is when we die, and we let Jesus live His life through us! So, the only thing we have to die to is what? Sin! It doesn't mean we hate our life on this earth. Jesus came and said “I have come that you might have life.” And then in John 15: “I have come to give you...joy.” That somewhere in our lives we have to sit there and say what I have to die to is sin...not die to life. And so many people in our church, not just ours, but other churches too...they die to life! And then they don't live life and they think “oh, this is what Jesus wants for me. He wants me to be miserable, he wants me to take up my cross every day, and just be miserable and die.” Good Friday is over!! Thanks be to God! The resurrection is here, and our job is now to live in Jesus Christ. To be as St. Agustin said “an alleluia from the top of our heads to the bottom of our feet.” An alleluia person! A person who lives life! And if you and I live life, then we know that it is not going to end! Some people... and again, when I was in Hubbard- I'm a miserable priest, you know it, don't you? Here I am preaching a Mission, and it was the most dead of all parishes I have ever been at in my whole life, in Hubbard! And I told them that!! I said to these people down there “the only difference between you and a cemetery is the people in the cemetery have dirt on their heads!” And they all looked at me like...Do you think I meant that? Yes!! Absolutely! What gives us the right

to say we are followers of Christ if we are not alive in Christ! What gives us the right to say that Christ is alive in me, if I am not living life! Some people die before they die. They do, and they live in this life and say “isn’t this a glorious thing? I am a follower of Jesus Christ; don’t you want to be just like me?” Oh, yea, let me be just like you! We should be so alive in Jesus, so that when people look in our eyes, they no longer see us, but they see Jesus living inside of us. And they should say “I want what you have! I want what you have, because what you have is life everlasting!” And that life everlasting begins the day we get baptized! But it needs to continue! If Andrea just gets baptized today, and she doesn’t live the faith, she will die just like everybody. No big deal! She got baptized! But if Andrea today – once we pour this water over her head in about two seconds – and she starts staying with Jesus – she will be a saint and she will live forever! You who have already been baptized – it is time to stop dying! It is time to start living! You got it? You get it? You gonna do it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever! Amen!