

May 15, 2006
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Fr. Larry Richards

Today is Mother's Day – Happy Mother's Day to the Mother's! You can tell that some of you are good to your mothers because you said “if you want to do something good for me...come to church!” So, I can tell, we have a lot of kids that normally wouldn't be here except its Mother's Day! How nice of you to come for your mother! So, welcome! Today, we start the gospel with the 15th Chapter of John's gospel – it is my favorite chapter – if there is only one chapter in all of the gospels – this is it. John 15 – I encourage you to read it. We start today and it continues the next couple weeks, but it starts with the vine and the branches. And as Bill Smith pointed out to me last night, that is very important for the church, because this church, more than anything else has a lot of vines in it – if you look up – coming out of all the angels – all the vines. You look on the sides – all the vines. There are vines every where to remind us that Jesus Christ is the true vine and we are the branches – we are part of Him. And as he said in the scriptures today “without Him, we can do nothing.” Are there any questions? Without Him we can do nothing! And so today, as little Michael gets brought into the Church, he becomes a branch of Christ. And so, that is a reality and we rejoice in that reality today. But you know, if you listen to all three of the readings today, it reminds me of this past couple of days ago, I was watching FOX News you know, for those who think I am a conservative – I am watching FOX and they had this group on – I am sure you have seen the group, haven't you? They go around and when a serviceman or woman has been killed – these nuts – sorry – go to the funeral and they hold up signs about “God hates homosexuals” and “All the world's going to hell” and “God's punishment is coming down upon everybody.” And this woman is just going off and she is screaming about Christ and how He is going to get us all! And I, of course, wanted to shoot her – BANG – someone shoot her and put her out of her misery, right now you pagan – you're going to see when you see Jesus. “Judge not lest you be judged!” I say “Go before the Lord and you are going to feel the judgment of God, you miserable woman!” Can you imagine? Huh? Nice thing for a priest, huh? But that is what I was thinking, because what is happening is when people are like that – and we are all like that! I'm like that and it drives me crazy! You know, in the last month I have been going through – not turmoil in my life – but challenges in my life I guess where I've been thinking “what is God calling me to do more of all the different things that are coming up in my life?” What does He want? And I'm sitting there kind of irritated with me the way I am, because by definition, I'm more challenging when I preach – can you tell? You know, I'm more – “Oooh, you have to do this and you have to do that.” And so, it comes off as me being judgmental! And so I thought “what is the big difference between me and that nut that was on FOX News the other day?” And I thought “not much.” Huh! You know, but that's the problem. And yet, we are all like that! We all can sit there and judge because when we judge others, we set ourselves apart from them. And, if you listen to the reading today – let's listen to the second reading – I want to go to two parts here – this is from John, and it says “Children, let us love not in word or speech.” Because talk is cheap! But “let us love in deed and truth.” So, we can't just sit there and say we are followers of Christ, we have to be people that love. And then it goes on to say “and His commandment is this: that we should believe in the name of

His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as He has commanded us.” That we should believe and we should love. That we should believe and we should love. So, let’s start with the first part – that we should believe. We come to believe or know Christ in our prayer, so when you pray, how do you feel in prayer? Let’s think about the last time you prayed – this is prayer, hopefully, you are at Mass- but let’s think about the last time you were alone and you prayed and let’s hope that if it wasn’t this morning, it was yesterday. How do you feel when you come into the presence of God? Do you feel condemned? Do you feel very unworthy? Do you feel that I am no good, why do you keep me around Lord? Because if we come before God and we feel condemnation when we come before God, and we don’t love ourselves the way He does, because, notice what Jesus did for us. While we were His enemies, He loved us – that He wanted us to be His friend. And so God does everything in His power to love you. He has done everything – He has given you everything, and yet here we come – and we come like these children that feel so unworthy and He says “I gave everything for you.” But if you and I – when we are in our prayer feel condemned or unworthy all the time, and we hate ourselves, then we are going to hate everybody else! It’s that simple! The way you and I are in our belief of God – if we believe that God is a judge who is going to get us all – then that is the way we will be to other people, because we are going to be like Him. And so if God is out to get the world, then I am going to be out to get the world. If God is love, and He loves me, then I am going to be love and I am going to love others, huh? The other day, I watched the movie Joshua – anybody read that book Joshua years ago by Fr. Joseph Rizzone? They made a movie out of it and so I got the movie and it is kind of a dumb movie, but it is a nice movie too. Anyway, it is about Jesus coming to the earth today, in a small town. He doesn’t have a beard or anything. And you know, He comes and He is a carpenter and the person who is most mad at Him is the pastor of the Catholic Church, of course. He is real close to the assistant, but the pastor hates Him, because one of the first things that Jesus does – is He starts rebuilding the Baptist Church. Can you imagine? God forbid! So, anyway, Jesus is loving these people and the priest is really out to get Him, and the priest, no matter what is out to get Him. So anyway, the priest gets Jesus to Rome, so that He can be condemned. And when He is brought to Rome, He is brought before the Cardinal and the priest starts telling the Cardinal how Jesus – is from the devil. And I’m ready to kill the priest, and I’m thinking “Jesus, you’re God, now GET HIM” is what I kept thinking! I’m sitting there thinking “he’s Jesus, go get him, it’s time!” And what Jesus does – he looks at the pastor who wants to get Him excommunicated and condemned by Rome – and He looks at the pastor and says “you’re afraid.” And the pastor says “how dare you say I am afraid.” And Jesus says “you are afraid to love.” And he starts fighting Jesus, and Jesus, instead of going at him went up to him, put his hand on his heart and says “don’t be afraid to love anymore.” And then this priest just started to sob and embraced him and said “I’m sorry my Lord, and my God.” But again, my wanting is for Jesus to get him – what Jesus wanted was to make his enemy his friend. Do you want to make your enemies your friends? Is that what you want? Do you and I have the heart of Jesus? Are we in this world to judge the world, or are we in this world to make our enemies our friends? Do we desire that they come to know that reality of love in Jesus Christ? You know, Mother Theresa said “If we judge people, we have no room to love them. If we judge people, we have no room to love them.” And so Jesus today tells us that the goal is that we are called to love! And the only way that that

happens is when we know that He is the vine – we are just the branch! We have to let Him love through us is the reality. And see if not, then what is going to happen is what happens in the first reading today. When they saw Paul, what did they say, does anybody remember? They were...afraid of him. They were afraid of Paul, the one who wrote most of the New Testament. And so if they would have stayed in fear and be afraid of loving him, then they would have never come to know so much of the Lord that Paul would tell them. And so, they had to get beyond that because they were the Christian community and instead of being afraid of Paul and judging Paul, they had to...love Paul. And when they made their enemies their friend, Paul was an instrument of salvation to them. When we learn to make our enemies our friends, they can be instruments of salvation to us. So, what needs to happen today is it begins in our prayer life. We come before the Lord, and we allow Him to love us. And then we say “Jesus, I’m afraid of people – I am afraid of loving, I am a great judger. So, Jesus today I give you permission – love through me – and may I desire that all my enemies become my friends.” Got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen!