

May 21, 2006
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Fr. Larry Richards

Today, the gospel is my favorite gospel. As I told you, we began it last week in the 15th Chapter of John. Now we stay in the 15th Chapter of John, but we go and we start with Verse 9. And you know, I entered seminary at 17 and I studied for....I was going to be a missionary – Society of the Divine Word – those who are from Erie know they used to have a place out in Girard. And that is where I was. I came up in high school seminary to go and I put in my letter to the seminary “I want to proclaim the good news of the gospel to the whole world.” And so I thought the best way to do that is to be a missionary. But then I went and was spending time with them, I realized that the missionaries were just at other places and spoke different languages, but they just ran parishes just like anywhere else. And I thought “there are too many pagans in America and we have to sit there and start here.” Because a lot of people go to church that are pagans! So I thought, way back then I am going to go to the Diocese, but then I thought that it was my decision. And so I remember – I’m praying and I’m praying and my spiritual director, who became bishop down in Washington, DC, one of the auxiliaries down there – he said “well, go and make a retreat.” So, I went and made a retreat, but then I remember sitting in front of the chapel in the middle of Epworth, Iowa – the middle of a pig farm – NOWHERE! Corn and pigs is what we had all around us in Epworth. And I remember going in this little chapel, and I said “Jesus, I will do anything you want - you just have to tell me what to do.” And I open up the word of God, and I look down and it said “you did not choose me, I chose you. And I commission you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and anything you ask the Father in my name, He will give you. What I command you is that you love each other.” So that was my first reading at my first Mass, because it always went back to that. But this whole gospel today is what is important. And if we listen to this gospel, it begins...I want you to listen to the opening line of the gospel today. Listen. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” You hear that? Let it enter into you. Here is Jesus, the God of the Universe that looks at you and says “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” You and I have to spend time with that and let that become our Mantra. So, I encourage you this week to spend five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes - an hour a day with Jesus, sitting there being still, and letting Him say this to you, because Jesus, who said to the apostles at the Last Supper, wants to say this to you every day. But you and I have to let it enter in because our prayer is everything else but that! Our prayer is “oh, I have to do my worship, oh, I have to do this, oh, I have to pray my rosary...” and its “give me, give me, give me!” And that isn’t what Jesus wants! Listen! “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” That is where prayer has to begin. Did you listen to that second reading today? Say “yes, Father.” Love does not consist that we have loved God but????????? That He first loved us! So, how does that become practical? In your prayer life is where it becomes practical! Now, how does that become practical in my prayer life, Father? By you and I shutting up and saying – listening – “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” It’s receiving that – it is accepting that – it is beginning there with Jesus, not beginning with you, or me, and what I do in prayer. Because then we get proud of our prayer life. And if you get proud of your prayer life...that is called sin! Prayer life isn’t about what you do with God. Prayer is about what He does with you

and what He does with me, and what He does with us first is... Loves us. And so, can you imagine if you give a gift to somebody and they reject the gift? They put it aside? The first thing God gives you and me in prayer is the gift of love. What do you do with that gift of love? Do you open it? Do you enjoy it? Are you thankful for it? Do you wallow in it? Do you get wrinkled in it, like if you are taking a bath and you spend so much time in the water – you get all wrinkled? Is that what happens when you are in prayer? “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” And then He gives us how prayer becomes real. Huh? “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” You have to let that enter in. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” And then what does He say? “Remain in my love.” How are we then to live in the love the Father? How are we then to live? We live in love. We don’t live in condemnation. We don’t live in self-condemnation. We don’t live that God is out to get us! We don’t live in fear that God wants us to suffer – for those who are masochists! We don’t live that way! That is not what Jesus says! He does not say “remain in my suffering.” He does not say “remain in my condemnation!” He does not say “remain in my judgment!” He says “remain in my love.” That is what He says! And so if you and I are going to be obedient to Him, then we have to start where He starts, so our prayer has to stop with us, and start with God! The first thing you and I have to do when we go to pray is put ourselves aside, and receive what He says to us. Most people, most people in the Catholic faith never get here because they are doing their prayers! That’s what happens. But you and I must start here – “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” Love consists in this – not that we have loved God, but He first loved us. So in prayer, He begins the prayer by first loving us, ok? Does everybody here – are we all on the same page here? Yes! This is where we begin our prayer. Letting the Father love us – letting Jesus love us. The same love that God the Father has for Jesus is the same love that Jesus has for us. So when you and I let Jesus hold us today at Mass, after communion, in that silence – when He holds you – He says, as He holds you “as the Father has loved me, so I love you.” Will you receive that today? But then...this is where we get the kick in the pants...because there always has to be a kick in the pants. Then He says “this is my commandment – love one another as I have loved you.” So this is where it kills me, when I was praying about this the other day – what to say. He says just as Jesus loves, then that is the way we are supposed to love. So let’s think if we can do this. Can you look at your husband or wife, your girlfriend or boyfriend, your mother or your father, your son or daughter, the person that works for you, the person you work for, and could you say to them “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you?” Could we say the same thing Jesus said to us – could we say that to the people in our life? Because that is the secret of loving God as He commanded. “Love one another as I have loved you.” How did love me? “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” So then what has to happen is that as the Father loves me, as I experience this love, then that is the way that I have to love you! And that’s the call! But get this – we can’t do that unless we first let Him love us! You know, if I could say to others – the people I work with, the people I minister to, the people in the parish – “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” The only way I can say that is if I have let the Father love me first. Now, just as the Father has loved me, that is how I have loved you! But if I have never experienced the love of the Father, if I have only tried to be a good person, if I have only tried going through the motions of living Christianity, to obey all the rules of Catholicism, then I put the whole reality on myself and what I do, instead of God and

who He is. God is love. And if we are going to live the commandment, if we are going to say our husbands, our wives, our sons, our daughters, our mothers and fathers – this is the test of whether we are true followers of Him. If we can look at the people in our life and say “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” And if you can’t do that – in your heart of hearts – if when you look over at your husband or wife today – if you know that if they were to look at you and say “just as much as the Father has loved me, I have loved you.” If they could not say “oh, no you haven’t...” then the problem is with you! What do you think you have to do? You have to spend more time in the Father’s arms. You have to hear Jesus say to you “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” And then what happens - is the way we remain in His love is we receive His love and then we give His love. That means we are remaining in it. But before I can give His love to anybody, I have to let it come through me first – that is where it has to begin! Jesus knew He was loved by the Father – that is how He could die on the cross – that is how He could be obedient to all of the commandments – that is how he could say that the world must know that I love the Father. Why? Because He knew He was loved by His dad! And if you and I never come to know that you are loved by your Father, then nothing else in Christianity will ever flow through you the way it should. God can use ineffective instruments – of course He can – He uses me every day! But the core of what God wants is for us to begin with Him and His love, and then give not our love, but His love. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.” Got it? Get it? Are you gonna do it? Ya better! And this is very practical, so the next time you pray, when you go to pray, you shut up and you say “be still” and you let God the Father – you let Jesus hold you and say “as the Father has loved me, so I love you.” After you have experienced that –THEN you go do your other prayers! But NOT until you have experienced it! So next time you pray – DO IT! Father said! May each of you know His love today and forever! Amen!