

Fr. Larry Richards
August 27, 2006
Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Good evening!! Ok, so I've already heard all the "old" comments – "oh, Father, you look so much older, oh, Father, you're going to get rid of the beard, aren't you?" I was on retreat this past week, down in Larchmont, New York, which is New York City. The one that gave me the retreat was Fr. Fullton – great, great man. But, I knew I was in trouble, when Friday night – he says "to pray is to change, and if you don't change – you don't pray." And I said "oh, dear, here we go." And then every day he hit me in the stomach – punched me out! There were three of us – Fr. Rich, Fr. Steve and myself – we felt beat up the whole time! Oh, you think I'm bad? Spend some time with this priest! He was unbelievable! Because what happened was he kept challenging that there are things inside of us that we have to change! That if we are still following Jesus in our own way – we are not following Jesus at all! And to say that to a bunch of priests, from all around the country – and he was telling us "oh, Fathers, you have to change!" And I was the priest longest ordained amongst the crew which made me feel old – that is why I am letting – I decided its time for integrity this week – so I'm going to go all gray! So, just so you know – hey, stop it! Ohhhhhhhh...well, we'll see! The beard, I don't know about that one way or the other...anyway! Today, when we listen to the word of God – it's phenomenal, today, isn't it? It fits, because Paul talks about this whole thing with husbands and wives. Now, I just preached on this a couple of weeks ago, so I won't get you again, because people hate this verse, don't you? You know, some of you – especially women – you hate this reading, because it says be submissive. And you sit there and say, "huh, if that's what it takes to follow Jesus, well, I'm not going to follow Him." Yep! That's exactly true! If that is what it takes – and it does – and you don't want to do that – then you won't follow Jesus – you're wasting your time. You see, this is what the whole second reading is about. And this is what it is to be church – to be church is to be a servant. If I am going to be a member of the church - that means that I am here to serve. Who is the first person we serve? God – Jesus Christ. You know when people stop coming to church, what is the main reason they say they stop coming to church? "I didn't get anything out of it." Oh...that has nothing to do with being a disciple of Jesus Christ! We don't become disciples of Jesus Christ so that we can get something out of it! That is selfish - that is serving ourselves! Or some people go to some churches because they are entertained – "I love it – they have a great choir, it entertains me, it makes me feel soooo good!" Well, then it is all about you! But if we are going to be a church – this church was consecrated 89 years ago for one reason – so that we could serve the God of the Universe. So, the first thing you have to ask yourself is why are you here tonight? Are you here to get something, or to feel good about the church or about yourself? Because if you are, then you are not a disciple. To be a disciple means you are here to serve Jesus Christ. And the way that I make my service to Jesus Christ real, is I serve the people around me, and it begins in the family – that the main reason is all of us in families, that's the church, huh? That is what Paul is trying say here. Paul says in the second reading – he says – after he says "wives be submissive to your husbands and husbands love your wives as Christ loves the Church" – which means He serves the church – He surrenders Himself – he says – "this is a great mystery, but I speak now in reverence to Christ and the Church"

The mystery is this – that Jesus shows us how to serve, by serving us. Jesus did everything He did, to serve you. He went to the Cross to serve you. He died to serve you. He becomes the Eucharist today, to serve you. The God of the Universe – that which the Universe cannot contain – will humble Himself and be present here – and then you are going to come up and we are going to give you God! That means God – who the Universe cannot contain – will humble Himself, if you will – He becomes bread and wine and then He feeds you. You know, now think about that – people who don't want to be submissive to other people – Jesus Christ is being submissive to you! He is God! And He could sit there and say “listen you are just here to serve me – if you are not here to serve me – get out!” He sits there and He gets on His knees, if you will and He says “here I am tonight, and I am going to submit myself to you. I, who am God, am going to become submissive to you, and I will feed you with myself.” Now He says “learn from me – be Me. If I, who am God, will do this for you, then you who are a man or a woman must do this for each other.” And it begins in your family. When I do deacon retreats, I go around and husbands and the wives are there and I say “deacons, oh, you are so holy, you get to do all of these things. Let me tell you, if you ever put the church in front of your family – get out of the church!” The main place –everybody here is called to follow Jesus first after we are coming to serve Him – to make that real is we do that with the church, which is our family. So, husbands, you are called to serve your wives – you are called to that – to be submissive to them. More so than them being submissive to you – because you are called to die for them. Every day, as I said a couple of weeks ago, you are to wake up every day and think “how can I serve my wife today?” And you need to put her first, huh? Wives – you are called to be submissive – you are called to serve your husband. Every day you wake up and say “I am here to serve you. I have one goal in my life, and that is to make my husband happy!” Now, some of you are sitting there thinking “boy, you can tell he's a celibate!” You know you are thinking that! Oh, what do I have to say? But that's the reality! That is the reality! And see, if you want to know how to do this – you are going to have to pray! And when you pray, you are going to change! And if you are not praying – you are not changing! See, that's why when Jesus started talking to the people about some of the things – get this – it was the disciples who left Him. 666 – Chapter 6 of John's gospel – Verse 66 – right before that – “this saying is too hard for us, and they would no longer walk in His company.” How about you? Is this saying too hard for you, that you exist to serve? That you exist to serve – to give your life away. That is why I exist – to give my life away! That is why we exist. And so first it happens in the family. Now, if you don't have a husband or a wife, like me, or if your husband or wife has passed and they are already seeing the glory of God, then you are called to give it for your extended family. And then beyond that, you need to show it by being a servant in the church. Again, like last week when we were asking for people – we got over thirty-some people who volunteered their musical ability to build up the body of the church. And see that is what Paul is trying to get at - don't you see that everybody here is called to serve the church – to build up the church! Not just this church – but think of all of the thousands of people who have gone before us. In ten years we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of our church. That means that thousands of people have denied themselves – have served to give us this building. Thousands of people who have gone before us in death – they are gone – they gave their life to build this building. They showed us that to be a follower of Jesus means that I am a servant and I serve my family

and I serve my church. This is what it is. First of all I want you to think of how you are serving Jesus and is that why you are here. Second of all, I want you to think how do you serve your family? I want you to think explicitly, how do you put your wife or your husband in front of you every day? And again, a couple of weeks ago I told you how to do that, husbands, right? By how? By right after today when you go home and you are tired and you want to watch TV, you sit there and you take that remote and you give it to your wife and you say, “here sweetheart whatever you want to watch!” That shows that you are a servant of your wife! “Ugh! This saying is too hard to endure!” But you have to make it explicit! How will you do it explicitly? You know, people say it all the time...you know, I serve....but explicitly. How you serve your spouse? And then, how do you serve the church – this church? How, in a thousand years from now, when you are all dead and gone, will this church be a better place because you built it up by serving? So, today to be church is to serve – Jesus, our church, our families! Got it? Get it? Gonna do it? You better, because to pray is to change! Oh, dear!