

Fr. Larry Richards
Second Sunday of Advent
December 10, 2006

Good afternoon. Today, when we are focusing on the readings, the word that is most pronounced in the gospel is prepare – to prepare. What are we called to prepare for? We are called to prepare for the way of the Lord – make straight His paths! Now, how do we do that? You know, and we used to just sit there and focus on the word “prepare.” And you know, “I’ll prepare for Christmas, and I’ll put out all of my Christmas decorations...” But it says “prepare the way of the Lord.” Now, what that means is that we have to be instruments of bringing people to Christ. And when people look at us, we have to be preparing them to come to know Jesus through us, and to do that, it is going to take four things to prepare...are you ready? Four things to prepare for Christ to come to other people in our lives. The first thing we have to do to prepare other people to come to Christ through us is we have to repent. We have to repent of our sins, and repenting of our sins, and you know, again some people don’t think they are very great sinners, and so when it comes to that part, they think, “well I don’t have very much of that, Father...” Well, repentance of doing things our way. That is what it ultimately comes down to. Because sin, of course, is primarily disobedience – it is doing things my way instead of God’s way. So, the first thing we have to do to prepare others to come to Christ through me, and that is the whole thing that John the Baptist did – he had one mission, to bring everybody he met into a relationship with Jesus through him! And that has to be our mission! That we desire to bring people into this relationship with Jesus through us. So the first thing we have to do is repent of our sinfulness about doing it my way – if it is my theology, my religion, my way of doing things. And again, I know people who are priests – I know people who go to daily Mass that are still into doing things their way! “Father, don’t bother me – this is the way I have always done it and it is the way I always will do it!” That is a sin! We have to be doing it God’s way – not our way! The first thing we have to do is repent! The second thing we have to do to prepare the way to Christ for others is we have to be people of prayer – first of all! Prayer in our own life - that you and I spend time with Christ – what we do in the prayer time is we keep handing over my will to God’s will. “Lord, I am here to listen to you, so that you can tell me what you want me to do.” But then, to bring others to Him, we have to be praying for them – specifically! And you know, I like to say and I would be interested in how many people in our parish – right here, because you have heard me say it before, once or twice – how many people have a prayer list of people they actually pray for? And not just your kids and your family – but for people who don’t know Christ. Do you pray for them specifically, by name, every day to prepare a way for Christ to come to them in their life? That when you pray for somebody, you are being the instrument that God is using – He desires that you do this. Because you are constantly praying for a person to come to an experience of Jesus Christ. So, do you pray for others in your committed daily prayer time? You pray to listen, but then you pray for others so that you can prepare a way for Christ to them. The third thing you have to do is be people who are Christ to others, or we are people who love others.

And you know, again, people will say “Father, how do I bring people to the faith”? I say “you pray for them first...but then you have to love them.” And again, I’m not the best at this part - I am more of a “judger” type. I don’t know if any of you are like this, but I’m more of a judger, hit over the head type person. But normally what that does is it chases people farther away! You would think that by now, after being ordained almost 18 years, I would learn that! But we don’t! We are still stupid in some ways! It is Father first! But we think that by judging people and hitting people over the head that they are going to come to Christ! Guess what? They are going to do the opposite! They are going to run away from Christ and it will be our fault, because we judged them, we yelled at them, and pushed them, instead of loved them! And if you read Benedict XVI first Encyclical “God is Love” he says that “we love people, because they are worthy of love.” We don’t just love them to convert them. So, when we love people, we love them without condition. It doesn’t always mean we are gentle on them; sometimes we do it to kick them in the butt! But that means that I ‘m am willing to put my life down and die for them, so that when I am sitting there and dealing with a person – before I can tell them anything – which is the fourth thing – they have to know that I would be willing to die for them! They have to know that I love them so much, that when they sit there and they look at me, and they look at you, they no longer see me and you, but they see Jesus inside of us. So, our job is to love people, and what we do when we do that is we show them the God of love and it is love that will bring others to change – it is love that leads people to repentance, huh? So the first thing we have to do is repent ourselves, the second thing we have to do is we have to pray, the third thing we have to do is we have to love. And the last thing we have to do to prepare the way of God for others is we have to be people who then tell. And there are two different ways of telling. The first way of telling is – which you have heard before – is St. Francis of Assisi, which said “preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.” That our life is the only gospel some people will read. So, what do they read? Do we tell people about Jesus by the way we live? The second thing is that we still have to tell them, and so to tell someone about salvation in Christ – Paul did it – he spent his whole life doing it – he died for it! Peter, James, and John, all the apostles went and proclaimed – not only with their lives, but with their words – the salvation that is in Christ Jesus! And so too, must we be people who tell people about Christ! That is how we prepare the way, but not until we do the three other things before that – not until we repent, not until we have prayed, not until we have loved them – then we have to tell them! We have to tell them because again, can you imagine the day you and I stand before God in judgment and He looks at us and says “come you who are blessed by my Father...” and we are all excited and we start walking towards the pearly gates of heaven, and then we hear Him say to the others “get out of my site, you condemned into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” And then you turn around – and when you turn around, there is a member of your family – when you turn around, there is someone you worked with – there was one of your friends that you went to football games with – there are all these people, and they are being sent to hell forever! And then they look at you and they say “why didn’t you tell me? Oh, you told me dirty jokes, you told me everything else, you gossiped with me, you watched the games with me, why didn’t you ever tell me about Jesus?”

Can you imagine that day how you will feel, when you get to go to the kingdom, and they get separated from God forever, because you never opened your mouth to tell them? So, today when the gospel tells us “prepare the way of the Lord...” that means that we have to desire with all our hearts like John the Baptist did, to bring others to Christ – to prepare the way for them, and the way that we prepare the way for them is we repent, we pray, we love, and we tell. Ya got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen!