

February 18, 2007

Fr. Larry Richards

Good Morning! Normally I take a Zanex when I fly, but I haven't been doing that because I am so tired when I take a Zanex, but this morning I'm thinking, "boy, I should have taken a Zanex, because the plane – we were an hour and ten minutes late – and we were like whoa, all over the place!" And then of course I come walking in at twelve minutes after 11 and I see that our sacristy is falling apart! It is leaking; it looks like the wall is going to come down any second! Anyway, yesterday I was in Milwaukee for the first Men's Conference in Milwaukee. They were hoping for 500 people – they ended up with 2,000! It was so packed – standing room only! There were so many conversions, and I even though I was sick all week, and I wasn't even sure I was going to come, but I stayed in bed, and I came up and I preached. And we were all talking about being a man – what does it mean to be a man of God, challenging men to be men and not be wimps, as so many are any more, in the Church, anyway, not taking spiritual responsibility, and the same in Temple, Texas, this past week. And one of the men came up to me and said "Father, you know my wife brought me here and that will never happen again. Its time for me to be the man of the house and be the spiritual leader." And I said "yes it is sir – its time!" And this is Jesus – he is challenging us! Just like me and Danny Abramowitz and Jesse Romero to challenge these men to do what God wanted. This is what Jesus is challenging us – men and women – to today. And there is so much in this gospel that I could spend an hour and a half today talking about – but I know you don't want me to spend an hour and a half talking to you today! But I want to deal with three things in the gospel today – there are many more, but there are three things, I would call them real marks of a Christian. The first – love your enemies! Hmm – put that aside. The second is be merciful as your Father is merciful. The third is stop judging. These are the things that we sort of put aside when it comes to following Jesus, because we sit there and let those things – and me too – oh, you know as well as I do – oh you know, about my love of God, or how I can preach, or how I can do these things, and the Lord sits there and says "oh, yea, I'm really happy, oh, that's nice. But, you don't love your enemies, you are not as merciful as I would like you to be, and you are a judger. Now stop it!" That is exactly how He says it to me; I don't know if He says it to you – maybe nobody here is like that. But I would be very, very interested if I was to have a showing of hands, which you won't have today – how many people pray for their enemies today? How many people love their enemies? Did you ever notice when we sit there and do the intercessions, we pray for our friends and our benefactors, and we pray for all those people who do well for us. Even at a Sunday Mass, do we ever pray for our enemies or those who hate our guts? And yet, that is one of the things that Jesus says – love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you – do good. And again, that is such a hard saying that we usually dismiss it, and we put this as one of those unreachable tenants of the faith! But it is a reachable tenant if we let Jesus Christ live His life through us! And again – that is a process! But the first place that you and I have to be is do I even want this process in my life? Do I want to love my enemies? And again – I think a lot of people don't! You know, again years ago my mother sat there and said "boy if that person is in heaven, I don't want to be there!" And I said, "don't worry Mother you won't!" It's that simple, huh? My own

mother – ohhhhhh! So, if I do it to my own mother, I'm going to have to do it to everybody else! But you know we don't get it! Jesus Christ said "love your enemies!" That is not an option! Jesus commanded it! So what do you and I do to love our enemies? Specifically! Can you give me something? "This is what I do Father to love my enemies. I say the Divine Mercy Chaplet for them. I pray for their conversion." I hope of course – when I do the men's conference, everybody gets real crazy with me when I did the priest retreat a couple of weeks ago – I say the clearest sign that we are getting anywhere close to where Jesus wants us is when we can really hope in our heart – and want and desire that the person who hates us the most, or the person that we hate the most – sits right next to us in heaven – forever. Wouldn't you like that? Think about the person you can't stand – just think about the person that you can't stand or they can't stand you, and think about them for all eternity – right next to you. Because when that starts happening, now we are starting to get the mind of Christ – now we are starting to be transformed from the world, and if you listen to the second reading, the Archbishop of Milwaukee, Archbishop Dolan, preached, and again, I have been scarred for life because you know, we are all in this big place – it's packed and we can't move – and the Bishop is a very nice guy, very gregarious and different things and so the priest that is in charge – 6 foot 6 – 380 pounds – big guy! And I'm sitting next to him and he says "oh, I forgot to get readers..." and he says to the other priest, because we were the main celebrants – "you do the first reading..." and so he got up and did this reading from Isaiah and then he looked at me and said "Larry, why don't you do the second reading..."? And I looked at the first priest and I said "what was the first reading? Isaiah? Ok." So I get up, and I start reading the reading. It was Year B, and so I am reading the wrong reading, and so of course, here I am and I start saying "The Word of the Lord..." and I felt an arm around me, and it was the Archbishop, and he said "Father, you read the wrong reading." "Oh, Bishop..." He embarrassed me...and I said "I am wounded for life!" And everybody laughed and he said "how about this one?" And I said "it was his fault Bishop." So, then I sat there and I read the real reading. And the second reading today is what he preached on, so he let the first priest go because it really didn't matter. He didn't let me go, and then he sat there and picked on me the rest of the Mass and I said "I will get even Bishop, or not Bishop." But anyway, as he preaches about the old man, Adam, and the new Adam is Jesus Christ. And he talks about how each one of us has that inside of us – that there is this fight inside of us. And then he told the story about the Indian, and he said this old grandfather Indian was talking to his grandson, and he says "grandson, I have inside of me two wolves that fight. One wolf is full of anger and jealousy and lust and hatred. The other wolf is filled with love and peace and forgiveness and mercy. And it is a constant battle inside of me. And grandson, you have the same battle inside of you." And the grandson looked at his grandfather and said "well, which wolf will win?" And the grandfather Indian said "whichever wolf you feed will win." And so then he went on to say how each of us has the natural Adam inside of us – the way of the world, the way of sin – and the spiritual Adam inside of us who is Jesus Christ, and who will win? The one we feed. And so if we constantly feed our anger, our lust, our judgmentlessness, our lack of mercy, our whatever it is. That will grow inside of us, because we keep feeding it – day in and day out – and that will grow and will eventually win – the old Adam will win. Or, we keep feeding our spiritual Adam – our Christ, through the bread of life, through time and prayer, through acts of self denial, as we are coming up to Lent. And if we feed that, then this will be the

one that wins. But every one of us has both inside, and every one of us has to struggle. So, we can decide to hate our enemies, or we can decide to love our enemies. Whichever one you feed – that is the one that will win. The second thing Jesus Christ tells us today is that after you are called to love your enemies today, He says.... “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful.” And again, as we have said a thousand times before, mercy is giving something good to someone who doesn’t deserve it. And again, I have to sit there and look at my life and think am I truly merciful? Are there still people I hold grudges against? Usually, I hold grudges for awhile, you know when I get an anonymous letter, or unsigned letter that says I am the Satan incarnate – again. And then I get all “blah, blah, blah...” and then I go “who cares...” when it comes down to it! What am I going to do? This is me, you know, I can’t help it. I try – this is the best I can do. And then, after awhile its like “let it go. Be merciful, let it go.” And so, how do we work with mercy in our life? Do we let go of the past, or do we hold on to it – do we cling to it? Do we gladly give mercy and forgiveness? Forgiveness is about us and about our past. Trust is about others and the future. To forgive somebody doesn’t mean you trust them for the future. It means you let go of the past so they no longer have power over you. Jesus commanded us to be merciful, because that is the way He is. And finally, which is the hardest thing for all of us who are followers of Jesus, is He says “stop judging, and stop condemning.” And again, I use the line all the time, and it is only because I know it within myself. We Catholics are great judges – but we are not so great lovers. “Well, that’s wrong, you can’t do that...” And again, I have to preach this stuff, huh? And I go around, and I’m talking to the men, and someone at the end – all my tapes got sold, and we did real well, and one of the guys came up to me and said “Father, thank you for kicking us in the butt!” And I said “Me?? I did that? I kicked you in the butt?” Yes! And that is the part! But what I kept saying what we have to do is focus and help know that the God of the Universe wants us to stop judging each other, stop condemning each other. And again, as we are sitting there and I’m meeting with these people from all around, and they are dealing with the marriage initiative, and they are trying to focus on no gay marriage and everything else. And I said “there are two ways we can do this. We can sit there and fight it and condemn all these people and lose anyway. Or we can love these people and show them another way. And until we learn that we have to try and love people and show them another way, instead of just condemning them, we are not doing what Christ commanded us to do. We still have to stick up for what’s right. We have to be willing to die for what is right. We have to be able to give it all up for what is right. But we don’t condemn others, we don’t judge others. We love them and we share with them the truth, because we want them to live forever. We don’t want it to be my way or our way. We want it to be God’s way, and so we share the truth in love, so that they can be set free from their slavery. Only when we get out of the mindset that we are not allowed to judge – God forbids me to judge – he forbid it. He forbid you, He forbid me – to judge our spouses, to judge our kids, to judge our parents, to judge anybody. He forbids us. That is not an option. So these are three sayings – three challenges of Jesus Christ today. How will you specifically do it? Each one of you – I encourage you this week to think about it. How will you love your enemy? How? Will you say Divine Mercy for them? Will you pray for their souls? How will you be a merciful person? How will you reach out in mercy to others who have offended you? How will you and I stop judging, so that we can be who

Christ calls us to be, instead of who the world calls us to be? Got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen!