

Fr. Larry's Homily – January 13, 2008

Good morning! As most of you know I just came back from a cruise, hee hee. Seven days of doing nothing, not getting any sun or anything. And the reality, you know you wonder I'm sure what four priests do on a cruise when we're on vacation. Well, even when we were laying out every day at the various beaches we were at I'd still say my Rosary and Diving Mercy, which I'm sure people kind of thought that was weird. And we all had our black swim trunks with the little white mark on the front to show that we were priests, ha ha. Fr. Ed Lohse had ones in fuchsia in the hopes that he'll be a monsignor someday.

But anyway, I did my holy hour every day, I said Mass every day, and you know we'd take turns celebrating Mass. The one day was the feast of St. Raymond. And Fr. Ed who's the Chancellor of the Diocese he was the main celebrant that day, and of course you know we'd prayed every day and we didn't do anything bad, trust me, nothing bad – it was a very relaxing time. But after Mass we talked about St. Raymond. And I sat there, and you know I'm sure people think, what do they talk about? What do priests talk about on when they're together on vacation? Well we argue theology, which is quite interesting. And so after Fr. Ed had Mass, I said, "This saint today stinks!" And Fr. Ed who's the Chancellor of the Diocese and a Canon lawyer said that St. Raymond is the patron of Canon lawyers. So, we got into a discussion, and I said, (this has a point, trust me) "Did you listen to the readings? Cause a priest has to pray seven times a day, and one of the things we do is pray the office of the readings. And I just want to read you just a paragraph, just part of it, and maybe some of you will like this, but I thought it stunk. Anyway, this is what it says, St. Raymond and this is one of his many writings, but this is just part of it (and think about me preaching this right now to you this Sunday):

"May you never be numbered among those whose house is peaceful, quiet, and free from care. May you never be numbered among those, those of whom the Lord's chastisement does not descend. Those who live out their days in prosperity, and in the twinkling of an eye go to Hell."

Oh, isn't that nice? So I'm reading that as I'm on my balcony overlooking the ocean, you know, and I'm sitting there thinking I completely disagree with that! Absolutely! All

saints, you know, are not perfect. That's why John Paul II made many, many, many, many saints to show that there's not one way.

Now some people have bought into that, but suffering for sufferings sake stinks! Have you ever sat there and seen people suffer? Do you think it's good when people are dying of starvation? 24,000 children or 34,000 children a day die every day because of suffering. Do you think the God of the universe is up there saying, "Oh I like to watch you people suffer"? "But that's okay; I'm going to bring you all to heaven." I reject a God like that, because that would not be a God of love. And you see that's not what's revealed today. What's revealed Christmas morning, what's revealed to the three kings, and what's revealed today is that God loves us! He's not out to watch us get hurt. That's what we've got to know. Now there is suffering, by definition, but it's the suffering of love. Big difference, when we suffer in love.

Fr. Michael was with us, Fr. Michael Kesicki, and as we were talking about different things, Fr. Michael who's always the smartest of all of us, by far, sat there and told us the story of Saint Vincent de Paul. And St. Vincent de Paul not only started the Vicentians, but he also started a religious order of nuns. And the head who's also a nun, I can't remember her right now her name, but anyway she writes to Fr. Vincent and says, "I'm struggling with two novices. The one novice keeps the rule perfectly. She does all this fasting and abstinence, and all these strict penances but she has no joy. But I have another novice who is the most loving of all people. Very joyful, all the nuns love her, she's always more concerned with others than she is about herself, but she struggles keeping the rule. What should I do?" St. Vincent said, "Get rid of the first and keep the second." Because if you keep the rules without joy, there's no hope; but if you love the Lord and do it joyfully, then you'll always learn to keep the rule out of love.

And see so with us. We must know that the God of the universe, everything begins for Jesus in His public ministry today. And as He begins this ministry today at the baptism, He doesn't hear, "You are my beloved Son, I want you to suffer." He looks and hears, and God the Father speaks to Him, "This is my beloved Son (or the other Gospel's say "You are my beloved Son") in whom I am pleased." See that's where it began with Jesus. It begins with knowing that He's the beloved of the Father. And so you might sit there and say to me, "Well that was good for Him but not for you and me". Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding – let me hit you in the head! Excuse me, the day you and I got baptized the same God that looked over at Jesus and said, "You are my

beloved Son”, that same God looked at you and He said, “You are my beloved daughter. You are my beloved son.” And if anybody here who has a son or a daughter would have your son or daughter just to watch them suffer, I would hurt you. Who here has a son or daughter, and you want to watch them suffer? Nobody! Of course not! And if you and I who are sinful, weak human beings don’t want our sons and daughters to suffer for sufferings sake, how much more does God the Father not want us to suffer for sufferings sake? How much more?

This is what Jesus did after, this is what Saint Peter, the first Pope says. He says in the second reading today, “God throws no partiality. God wants,” it says, “you know the word that He sent to the Israelites has proclaimed peace!” So different than what that other one said. God wants us to have peace through Christ Jesus. The last words of Jesus on Earth were, “Peace is my gift to you.” Peace is my gift to you! So He wants us to have peace, who is Lord of all. And then when God anointed Jesus, this is why God anointed Jesus according to Peter: “He anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power and He got baptized, and He went about doing good, and healing those who were oppressed by the devil.” God wants to bring you and me peace, and He wants to heal us. That’s what the word of God says. And what we’ve got to do today is start rejoicing. Some people, nobody here, but other people come to God and there’s never a smile on their face. There’s never any joy. They think God’s out to get them. Every time He looks at them He’s ready to scowl and go, “You again.” But God rejoices over you; He’s pleased with us when we try to do our best. None of us are perfect. Isn’t it amazing how different people sit there and say, “Oh Father, I’m not perfect.” Or, “Father, I know I don’t deserve heaven.” No you don’t, you betcha. Aren’t you pleased at the mercy of God? Aren’t you pleased that He’s still pleased with you because you’re trying? You’re trying, you’re getting up and you’re trying? Would it put joy in your heart and in your face?

That’s what today tells us. That’s why you see Christmas, all of my Christmas stuff is still up in the house. “Well Father, you’ve been gone.” It would be up no matter what. It might still be up another month or two but that’s beside the point. But the reality is it’s such a celebration of love! That Christmas is a time where we just celebrate that God loves us so much that He wanted to be one with us. That God reaches out to us.

Again, years ago when I was sitting there with a kid named Bill, and I'm walking through the halls of St. Mark's Seminary and I'm a young high school seminarian, and there's the younger high school seminarian, Billy Joe. And as Billy Joe's just sitting there and he's smiling from ear to ear on a Saturday morning. And I'm thinking, it's seven o'clock – who's smiles from ear to ear at seven o'clock in the morning? And as I'm looking at him I said, "Billy Joe, what are you smiling for?" He goes, "I was up all night last night Larry." I said, "And you're smiling?" And he goes, "Yep. I was thinking and I was praying." "What were you thinking about and what were you praying about Billy Joe?" He goes, "You know, all those other religions? The people are always trying to find God." He said, "You know what's so special about Christianity?" "What, Billy Joe?" "God is always trying to find us." That's what Christmas is about. God leaves heaven to find you, to find me, and to save us, to heal us. And not only sit there and redeem us, He could have redeemed us and let us live as servants. He redeemed you and me and lets us live as sons and daughters. You are God's son. You are God's daughter.

And if you will live a life of love, you will suffer – because of love, because you'll give away your life for others. That's a great suffering. That's the suffering that God wants all of us to have. That's the suffering His Son endured. His Son didn't go to the cross just because He wanted to feel pain. He didn't relish in suffering. He didn't want it, did He? "Let this cup pass Me by." But then He embraced it, not just to feel suffering but so that you and I can live. Suffering for sufferings sake stinks. Suffering for love brings life.

So today the call for you and me is just as Jesus, is to live as sons and daughters of the Father. To be people of joy. To be people who gladly suffer for loves sake, but never seek suffering for its own sake. Never. That we become people who gladly give away our lives, we bring peace to others, and healing to others because that's what our God does for us. Got it? Get it? Gonna do it? Good! May each of you know His love today and forever, Amen.