



Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time B

June 17, 2018

- ◆ Father's Day
- ◆ Lesson of the Parable of the Seed

Today, we pause to give thanks for our fathers, living and deceased. As with Mother's Day, Father's Day is one of mixed emotions for many people. Ideally, all of us should, like Valerie Dillon in the reflection below, have positive feelings about our father. But in reality, that is not the way for lots of people. Many sons and daughters have a broken relationship with their father. Many boys and girls reach their adulthood with what psychologists call a "father-hunger" in their psyche. This means that they have never been validated, nurtured or affirmed by a father figure. However, many men go on to be very good fathers and many women end up marrying a man who is not emotionally absent to them like their father. Others, sad to say, are not as fortunate.

Valerie Dillon reflects on what it means to be a good father

Valerie Dillon used to have a regular column in *Columbia*, the Knights of Columbus' monthly magazine. In one of her columns, she wrote about her relationship with her own father and what a good father should be.

Never a Father's Day comes 'round that I don't think of my own father, gone from us for more than 20 years, but always fresh in my memories.

I think of him, sunburned and smiling, cigar in hand, sitting in a bleacher seat at Comiskey Park in Chicago. His passion—and mine—was the Chicago White Sox, and we were pals.

My dad was a gently, dignified man who never raised his voice, never criticized, always expected the best from me. He went to Mass with us every Sunday morning, which is not surprising—except he wasn't Catholic.

*I guess my father's greatest gift to me was he **loved me unconditionally**. When I learned that he had died, unexpectedly, my first thought was: "In all my life, Dad never said one unkind or harsh word to me!" I know now that he was the person most responsible for helping me to believe in a loving God.*

On Father's Day, I honor my dad and also all of those fathers who try so hard to be good to their children.

Once a man was a "good father" if he worked hard and provided well for his family. But, today, perhaps more than ever before, we realize how much children need their dads to be loving and involved fathers.

What can a father give to his sons and daughters to enrich their lives and cause them to bless and revere their dad?

*There is **time**, given generously and graciously, even when other matters press him down. When a father takes time to listen to his kids, to laugh at their fifth grade jokes, to have fun with them, to be present for the important events in their lives—he communicates an unmistakable message: "You matter to me, I love you." Nothing says it better.*

*There is a willingness to **share feelings**.... So hard for men who were raised to think that being strong means never admitting fear, pain or weakness. Instead, children need to know their fathers as fully human, to see the vulnerable and tender side, to watch how dad handles hard times and hurts as well as success.*

*A good father has **integrity**. He keeps his word even—especially—to his kids and his wife. In a time when a sense of honor and responsibility seem in short supply, children need such a model.*

A good father loves his kids' mother, and gives example to his sons what a loving man is like, while showing his daughters what they should expect in their own future. Even if the marriage is troubled or broken, such a father knows that "kids are non-divorceable." At the least, they need to see respect, gentleness and friendship between their parents.

*A good father **shares home responsibilities** with his wife, who is probably also employed outside the home. This does not lessen his "dignity" or manhood, but shows a true spirit of partnership.*

*A **sense of humor** and a spirit of playfulness are wonderful traits in a father. If dad can laugh when the diaper is dirty or the car door is scratched...if he can enjoy having fun with his family, and see life's humorous side—he offers them memories for a lifetime.*

If you would be a good father, it's impossible to overestimate the necessity of being a healthy person. Alcoholism, an inability to share feelings or to be affectionate, an addiction to work or television, an explosive temper—all of these suggest emotional needs or problems that need to be addressed. No parent can give what he or she doesn't have.

A loving father does not live through his children. He does not expect to find his own identity nor sense of worth in what his children can accomplish, even as he takes pride in their good works. This allows him to be moderate in criticism and realistic in expectations.

A good father is a **man of faith**. He believes in a God of mercy and goodness. He is not embarrassed to talk about it, nor to show his dependence on God. He prays with his children day-by-day and, especially, in moments of crisis and loss. Such faith is a precious heritage to his children when lack of faith is everywhere.

Reflection questions

- What speaks to you most in the above reflection?
- Do you have any unfinished business in your relationship with your father, whether he is living or deceased? If your answer is yes, what one step are you willing to take to heal what is broken?

PRAYER OF A FATHER

Father, I really need someone to talk to.

You'll understand because you know
what it means to be a father.
Sometimes it seems to be more than
I can handle, I get nervous.

Help me to share so much love and hope and trust
with my children that they'll see beyond me to
you, their Heavenly Father.

This is quite a world in which to raise children.
It's full of perils and obstacles.
Show me how to guide them.

Give me wisdom so that I may be a strong father,
but not an autocrat;
a loving father but not an indulgent,
spoiling one.

I know that ultimately they must grow
and make their own decisions.
But guide me in showing them how to live
with Jesus, your Son, so that their every choice
may be made in his friendship.

And thanks, Father, for the gift of these children.

With your grace, I'll try to be the person
that they would like to be when they grow up.
Amen.

FATHER'S DAY BLESSING

Loving God, we give you thanks for the many gifts you have given us: the gift of life, the gift of those who love us and especially, today, we thank you for the gift of our fathers.

We ask your blessing upon our fathers who give us
rules to live by,
standards to uphold,
joys to cherish,
faith to guide us,
hopes worth dreaming of.

We ask your blessing upon our fathers
who are unable to be with us today.
May they know how much we love and care for them.

We ask your blessing upon adoptive fathers,
that they may always know their special role
of being a true father,
a revelation of God's love for their children.

We ask your blessing upon fathers who have lost
children through miscarriage, stillbirth, crib death,
sickness, accident and tragedy, that they may have
your continuing strength and courage.

We ask your blessing upon those who want to be
fathers or have another child, that they may be
patient and feel your love as they wait and hope.

We remember our fathers who have died
and for the unique way they revealed for us your love
and who blessed our lives with their unselfish and
unconditional love. We ask that you keep them
in your care until the time comes for us
to join them in your Kingdom.

We ask God's blessing and protection on fathers
who are away serving our country—
especially those serving in Iraq and Syria.
Lord, please protect them.

And we ask your blessing upon the fathers standing
here before us. Let the example of their faith and
love shine forth. Give them the strength to live the
faithful and loving lives you call them to live.
Protect and guide them. Keep them in your care
and grant that their children may always honor
them with a spirit of profound respect.

May your blessing be upon all of them, in the name of
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Parables

Jesus' way of explaining the mysterious workings of God

When we read the Gospels of Mark, Luke and Matthew, notice that Jesus frequently used parables as a way to make some point.

British scholar Charles Dodd has given the Church its most classic and enduring definition of a parable. According to Dodd, a parable is:

"A metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."

Today's first reading from Ezekiel and the Gospel from Mark seek to engage us with parables. Patricia Sanchez writes:

Parables are specific literary forms, told for a particular religious or ethical purpose in order to provide thought and challenge their hearers to decisive action. Every parable has two levels of meaning, the literal meaning and the topical or figurative meaning. Whereas the literal meaning is direct and forthright, readers of the parables must allow themselves to be "teased into active thought" so as to deduce the true and deeper, less obvious lesson of the parable.

For example, at first glance, both Ezekiel and Mark appear to be offering their readers some agricultural or horticultural information. But, as is the character of the parable, there is further, yet-to-be-discovered meaning beyond the images of trees and seeds. Those who, in faith, accept the invitation of the parable to look beyond the words and images will find therein a message about the reign of God.

Reflecting on the Parable of the Seed, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes.

In Jesus' parable of the seed growing of itself, what is stressed is the certainty of the harvest once the sower has done his job. It was meant to encourage those early disciples who had become discouraged because little seemed to be happening. It was telling them to be patient, to trust, and not to expect instant results.

Like those early disciples, we too want results and we want them fast. We live in the age of the instant product. We have instant soup, instant tea, instant photos, pretty well instant anything. We know that the quality suffers, but we are willing to sacrifice that for the time and effort saved. It's all about convenience.

Our age could also be called the age of the push button. All we have to do is press a button or turn a

switch and things happen.

All those labour-saving devices—escalators, automatic doors, passenger lifts, washing machines, frozen foods—take some of the monotony and drudgery out of life and work. But there is a danger in living in the world of the push button.

The push button encourages the minimum effort, the least cost, the shortcut approach to everything. It may lure us into always seeking the easy option, even when there is no easy option—at least not if we want the genuine article.

Certain things cannot be rushed. To grow to maturity as a human being is the job of a lifetime. To build a good relationship with someone takes time. To get to know and understand one's children takes time. To overcome one's sins and weaknesses takes time. There are no shortcuts for things such as these.

In Jesus' story the farmer did his part—he sowed the seed. All he could do then was trust, be patient, and wait. These are not easy virtues. Yet life calls for a lot of these virtues. Some people think they must always be up and doing—as if everything depended on them.

There is something we can do, and which God will not do for us. But that done, we have to acknowledge that we can't do everything. Spiritual development, and indeed human development, is a process. It will go on provided we do not resist it. In the great processes of growth, healing, recovery, and spiritual progress, we are only facilitators. We can plant the seed, but we can't make it grow, it is God who gives the increase.

We should learn patience from watching nature. Things take time to grow. Growth may be slow, but nothing can keep it back. Oaks that flourish for a thousand years do not spring up like a reed. Nature doesn't take shortcuts. All the seasons are needed.

We need all the season too. Look at the example of Jesus. Before beginning his public ministry, he spent thirty years at Nazareth. To some it might seem a waste of valuable time. Nothing could be further from the truth. In his humanity he needed those years. During them he was growing quietly in the shadows.

The parable of the seed growing of itself is a very encouraging little parable. It shows us that there is an almighty power working for us. Our job is to sow the seed. Then God has to take over. And God does. Any farmer will tell you that. If we do the right thing, the harvest will come.

But we are too concerned with immediate results. We must be patient, we must wait, and we must trust. These are now the most counter-cultural things that anyone can do. We must be content to plant small seeds, convinced that we are doing something that will in time bring happiness and not just a quick high.

Story

Eddie was an only child. He grew up in New York in an Irish neighborhood. Unfortunately, his father and mother separated when he was very young. He was brought up almost entirely by his mother (Nellie).

Many years later, when Eddie got engaged, Nellie strongly disapproved of his fiancée because she was from Puerto Rico, and not Catholic. When they decided to get married in a civil ceremony in City Hall, Nellie refused to attend.

The girl (Maria) turned out to be a person of outstanding generosity and deep religious faith (she belonged to an evangelical church). Even so, Nellie continued to give her the 'cold shoulder.'

When Nellie reached her early seventies, she contracted terminal cancer. Now she needed care. Who cared for her? Maria did. She took her into her home and cared for her till the end. One day, shortly before she died, Nellie apologized to Maria for the way she had treated her over the years. Then she took the only thing of real value she possessed—a gold watch—and gave it to Maria.

This true story shows that if we do the good thing, the harvest will come.

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Have a blessed week,

Fr. Aaron