



Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 19, 2016 C

♥ *Happy Father's Day!*

- ◆ Paul condemns classism, sexism and racism
- ◆ Spiritual reading unlike any other kind of reading

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. 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* can you take to heal what is broken? How willing are you to take that step?**

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.

Paul on the sin of racism, classism and sexism

It is said that one morning prayer a devout Jew would have said in Jesus' time went like this: "God, I give thee thanks that I am not a Gentile, a slave or a woman." Paul, a devout Jew, would have been raised in such a tradition.

In today's second reading, Paul is speaking to the church at Galatia, a church which, it seems, continued to believe that people were *saved by keeping the law*. Paul says, 'No, this is wrong.' We are *saved by keeping faith in Jesus*. We are saved by surrendering our lives to Jesus. In baptism, we are "clothed with Christ" (symbolism of the baptismal garment). Once we are baptized, other *important* distinctions are relegated to a place of unimportance. Hence, for Paul it is of no importance whether one is a Jew or Gentile, slave or free man, male or female. "All are one in Christ." All of us are equal in Christ. In today's brief reading, Paul condemns classism, racism and sexism.

We probably can't even imagine the social implications of such a teaching for the people of Paul's time. Remember this teaching was given to a people who firmly believed Jews were superior to Gentiles that slave owners were obviously superior to their slaves and men were superior to women.

This was the accepted belief of the day and now Paul is challenging it. Paul is saying to slave owners, "In Christ your slave is your equal. He is not in any way inferior to you. Begin to treat him as an equal." This was 'crazy talk' until not so long ago, as we know well from our history here in America. The question for us today might be: Are there people whom we consider to be inferior to us just because of their background or because they are not as economically well off as we are?

Secondly, Paul is telling the *Jewish* Christians in Galatia to accept new *Gentile* Christians as equal to them. "They are not inferior to you in any way." This was not easy for the Jewish Christians to accept just as it might not be easy for us to accept other races as equal to us. For centuries, the English looked down their noses on the Irish and on many other races. (What a big nose they must have had!) When the Irish came to the U.S., they were treated as second-class citizens. But once they "made it," they, in turn, looked down *their* noses on other races. Even though much progress has been made in this area, we all know that racism is still alive and well.

A question for us in this area might be: Do we have any racist tendencies? Do we sometimes treat some people differently simply because they happen to belong to a certain race?

Finally, Paul challenges men to accept women as equal in the Lord. Again, this would have been outrageous and radical in a male-dominated society. In this area, the question for us men is: How do we look upon women? Do we tend to see them as our equal in our home, workplace and church?

Isn't it amazing that for 19 centuries, the Christian Church pretty much ignored Paul's condemnation of racism, classism and sexism. The Church was just as bad as the rest of society when it came to treating the slave, the Black or Native American, or women—with dignity and respect.

In recent decades, our Catholic Church, guided by Papal Social Encyclicals, have become champions of the poor. She has done well in treating all races of people as important and valuable. The Church has made some strides in recognizing the role of women, but I think much more needs to happen in this latter area.

Spiritual reading is unlike any other reading

Most of you reading this column probably engage in some spiritual reading—be it the Bible or some other spiritual book.

As we engage in spiritual reading, it is important to note that it is unlike any other form of reading. We should *not* bring to spiritual reading the same *mindset* we have when we read a novel or a textbook or newspaper.

When reading non-spiritual books, we usually move fast as we go through a story or gather information. With spiritual reading, the way to do it is to move slowly to let the Holy Spirit use a sacred text to nourish our deeper self. We should approach a sacred text with a humble, open and receptive heart. The goal of spiritual reading is spiritual transformation. We read *slowly* and *meditatively* so that the sacred text can penetrate our deepest selves for the purpose of spiritual nourishment, illumination and direction for our lives. Spiritual reading is an art to be learned. It involves, among other things, growing in sensitivity to the Spirit who speaks to us through certain sentences or phrases. It especially involves the discipline to say 'No' to that part of us that wants to read on when the Spirit may be calling us to close the book while we 'sit with' some idea that has touched us. It is normative to only get through a few paragraphs or, at most, a few pages of a good spiritual book during one sitting.

Have a blessed week,



