



Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 21, 2015 B

A Message to Husbands and Fathers on Father's Day

Today, across our nation, we remember our fathers—living and deceased.

Ideally, all of us should have a positive and loving relationship with our father but, unfortunately, that's not the reality. Many sons and daughters have a wounded relationship with their father. Many boys and girls reach their adult years with what some psychologists call a "father hunger" in their psyche. This means that they have never been validated, nurtured or affirmed by a father figure.

The following article, written by Fr. Frank Hollman, is very good and timely. It is rather challenging—more than a 'feel good' piece for Father's Day. If you think it might be helpful to husbands and fathers who may not be at our church this weekend, please consider sharing it with them.

Among the most inspiring passages in the New Testament is St. Paul's litany of sufferings he endured for Christ and his Gospel. He pours out his heart in his second letter to the Corinthians: "Five times I received forty lashes less one. Thrice I was scourged, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck..." (2Cor 11:23-30). And the list goes on.

That passage is worth reading slowly, using your imagination. You cannot help but be impressed by Paul's faith, commitment, toughness, manliness and fidelity. Paul was a man's man, and would make a great mentor for you and for me. He chose his words carefully, basing his advice to the nascent Christian communities on experience and prayer. That gave his counsel the power and attractiveness of truth.

If St. Paul were to write a letter to American fathers today, what would he say? I suspect he would give the same instructions he gave 20 centuries ago to the Ephesians and Colossians. After all, human nature has not changed.

"Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them" (Col 3:19), he would say. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Not a lot of words, but plenty to think about.

Paul Vitz, a noted psychologist, professor and

convert to the Catholic faith, has concluded that, based on his research and investigation, children who have a problematic relationship with their natural father are more likely to have a difficult relationship with God, the Father in heaven. It is a phenomenon that I have observed in my pastoral experience as a priest: if you hope for your children to love God, you will make it all the easier for them if they find you loving and lovable.

"Husbands, love your wives."

In the first place, to love your wife means to be faithful to her: Your heart belongs to her. You can share it with no one else, except your family. Your sentiments, affections, daydreams and ambitions must revolve around her like a passenger jet in a holding pattern waiting for a safe haven.

When men ask me—as a priest and adviser—if it is appropriate for them to maintain correspondence with an old friend who is female (you know the sort of thing—a telephone call, email, etc.), I invariably reply with the same question: Is it OK for your wife to call or email an old friend who is male? Invariably, they say "no."

Fidelity does not happen; you have to work for it, at your place of work and on the road. At work, it is so very helpful to keep a photo of your wife and family on display and within sight. If a colleague asks you why you have it there, tell him: "That's why I work and who I work for."

When you're on the road for sales meetings, consulting or conventions and are unable to bring your wife with you, take the family picture instead and place it on top of the television in your hotel room. Be sure to call home every night and give your wife and children a telephone number where they can reach you at all times. That kind of availability strengthens your fidelity.

Oh, and a married man has no business alone in a bar or a nightclub when he is out of town without his wife. Some may find this advice difficult, too, but again I can assure you that no one who has taken it has ever gone astray.

A very zealous convert who has helped many men become better husbands and fathers once asked how he could best help his teenage son. I told him, "Love his mother, and don't let him be disrespectful to your wife." Yes, the best way to help your children is to love their mother and treat her like a queen.

Allow me to offer some suggestions. Never criticize your wife in front of the children—not on her cooking, her housekeeping, or your mother-in-law. Discussions of this sort are best reserved for private conversation and when you are not tired and cranky.

Make a fuss about your wife when she is sick. Don't hesitate to take a day off from work to accompany her to the doctor. Let her know that you will see to it that everything will be taken care of: meals, laundry, housekeeping, transportation. When you show affection for your wife in these very real ways, you awaken in your children—who cannot help but notice your behavior—a sense of reverence and piety.

Never tolerate the least disrespect or disobedience from the children toward their mother. Such attitudes are unjust, unfair and unloving. You can help your children obey and respect their Mom if they know that Mom and Dad form a unit. They should know that if Mom says, “yes,” the answer is “yes,” and Dad will back her up. And vice versa.

I remember asking some junior-high students what was the biggest trouble they could get into at home. One fine young man, whose parents have raised their children superbly, exclaimed: “The worst thing to do in our family would be to ask Dad for permission to do something Mom had already told us not to do.” Great answer!

Do you give your wife a big hug and kiss when you get home from work? Do you spoil her on her birthday, Mother's Day and your wedding anniversary? Do you take her out to dinner often? Are you still courting her? It takes an effort to keep your love young, but it is well worth it. A saintly bishop once told an American couple: “John, you have a pathway to Christ, and that pathway has a name. The name is Nancy. Nancy, you have a pathway to Christ and that pathway also has a name. The name is John.”

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

It is easy to provoke a 4-year-old: Just take away his toys and stick out your tongue. Your 13-year-old daughter might throw a fit if you do not allow her to see a current popular film that you deem inappropriate. The 17-year-old son wants nothing more than to show you he can do it all by himself, so your attempt to be helpful sometimes only makes things worse.

The range of youngsters' emotions and expectations makes it tricky business indeed for a Catholic father today. So, when St. Paul writes, “Do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged,” what does he mean? Certainly youngsters need to be corrected and

*guided by their parents. Sometimes, when reprimanded, they feel hurt or are enraged. But a negative reaction to parental intervention is often nothing more than their jungle pride coming out, and a good and strong father has to be willing to endure the acrimony. But if children are not corrected, if their every whim is satisfied, if their whining is controlled by domestic bribery—they may easily turn out to be egocentric **monsters by their early teens.***

Still, there are ways to correct that encourage; on the other hand, some manners of reprimanding breed bitter resentment. A good rule of thumb for paternal diplomacy is the 3 to 1 ratio: three words of encouraging praise for every word of criticism. Then in Advent and Lent, instead of giving up chocolate, try to give up nagging. Jesus will be much happier. In sum, the best platform for correction is love: Your kids have to know that you love them.

What advice can I give you to help you to be a better father? What follows are some ideas, which you have probably heard before, but still they may be useful.

A good father is a fun father. Spend time with your children; take an active interest in their affairs; engage them in conversation on a daily basis; play games and sports with them. It is not just a question of “quality time.” Your children also need “quantity time.”

Get in the habit of doing something constructive with them that helps the family or others, such as repairs around the house or yard work, or maybe even volunteer work together to help the needy. And remember, they will never forget the times you came to see their soccer games or band concerts. Yes, your children share your DNA, but they have a deeper yearning. They want to share your heart.

Do you ever pray with your children? I am not just talking about grace before meals. On a visit to his hometown several years ago, Pope John Paul II was asked by a journalist if he could remember anything about his father that he could share with them. “I remember when I was young and my father could not sleep at night, he would go downstairs and pray. That helps me now,” he replied. With the power of your example of prayer, there is no telling how much good your child could do some day. The first chapters of Tad Szulc's “Pope John Paul II: The Biography” give a glimpse of the warm and close relationship young Karol had with his father, the lieutenant. From this father, the future pontiff learned devotion to the Holy Spirit and acquired many other pious customs and devotions that remained with him.

Yes, fathers have a duty to raise their children well, but above all they have to raise their children to be Christians. The best way to do that is if they are first

pious and devout Christians themselves, and not ashamed or embarrassed to pray with their children or speak to them about God.

Rather than give your children money, give them time. It is so tempting to substitute money, trinkets and gadgets for the attention and affection they really need. Be smart and keep your kids short on money, teaching them by your example to make a contribution at Mass each Sunday. You might even want to explain to them the value of tithing!

Vigilance, fathers, vigilance. Don't be naïve. If you do not know where your children are, then you do not know what they are doing. If your child dresses like a "pot-head," he may very well behave like a "pot-head."

If the writers and producers of television shows are not fervent and convicted Christians, can you expect the programs that are aired to lead your youngsters to Christ? Get in the habit, as the vigilant father, to select what programs will be watched on TV. If something unholy comes on the screen, assert yourself as a shepherd. As you hit the remote to change the channel, pronounce the verdict so everyone within earshot can hear you: "This is trash!" It is such a liberating feeling to do that! Some people might think you are demanding too much, but you will have spoken the truth; and once the truth is heard, it cannot be unheard. And all of this has to be done with a sense of humor.

As a Catholic father who has the role of forming children as Christians, you will be much more effective if you realize that to be a Catholic in America at this time means to be different. We think differently and we live by different standards, so our behavior will be a contrast to the prevailing culture. As Christians we cherish devotion, fidelity, service, respect, humility, purity, piety, poverty, honesty and life. If we judge by what we often see in the media, the spirit of our age often mocks the very values we hold in high regard.

So, if Christians are surrounded by a culture that generally does not nurture their ideals, they are faced with a choice: Give in, or fight. For that reason a father has to help his children—boys or girls—to be tough physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. To live as Christians, they will have to fight for their beliefs and risk walking alone. If they are not emotionally tough, they will not be able to make those difficult choices. You will help your children immensely if you do not let them take themselves seriously or feel sorry for themselves. Let them learn that it is more important to be holy than to be right.

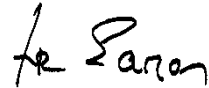
Fathers, what should you try to give your boys? A taste for hard work and initiative, respect for women and chastity, and a deep love and reverence for the Holy Eucharist. Give your daughters also a taste for hard work, affirm them in their modesty and help them

develop tender affection for the Blessed Virgin Mary. You may think this advice comes from the 19th century, but it is based on experience with today's youths.

St. Paul used few words when he gave advice to husbands and fathers, but how much content they contain! You just might want to write them down on a piece of paper and meditate on them from time to time. I assure you, it will help.

[Fr. Frank Hollman, *Our Sunday Visitor* Catholic newspaper, June 1999]

Have a blessed Father's Day,



A Prayer for Fathers

God our Father,

We give you thanks and praise
for fathers young and old.

We pray for young fathers,
newly embracing their vocation;
may they find the courage and perseverance
to balance work, family, and
faith in joy and sacrifice.

We pray for our own fathers
who have supported and challenged us;
may they continue to lead in strong
and gently ways.

We remember fathers around the world
whose children are lost or suffering;
may they know that the God of compassion
walks with them in their sorrow.

We pray for men who are not fathers
but still mentor and guide us
with fatherly love and advice.

We remember fathers, grandfathers,
and great-grandfathers who are no longer with us
but who live forever in our memory
and nourish us with their love.

Amen.