



Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time A June 21, 2020

- ◆ **Happy Father's Day!**
- ◆ **Last week's homily on hot-button issues, racism in particular**

Today we pause to give thanks for the blessing of fatherhood.

As with Mother's Day, Father's Day is a day of mixed emotions. It is a happy day for all who were or are blessed with the gift of a kind and loving father. But even in this fortunate situation, there is pain for those who recently lost their fathers. For sons and daughters who have a poor relationship with their father, this is a painful day. For fathers whose children have lost their way, this is a painful day. Having said that, we give thanks today for all dedicated fathers, not perfect, but who really work hard at being good fathers.

Frequently, on Father's Day, I share the following piece by Valerie Dillion, who paid tribute to her own father some years ago in the *Knights of Columbus* magazine *Columbia*.

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.*

[Valerie Vance Dillon wrote a regular column for the Knights of Columbus Magazine, *Columbia*. This article appeared in an archived issue of *Columbia* magazine and is reprinted with permission of the Knights of Columbus, New Haven, Conn.]

Homily on life issues, including racism

Last weekend at the 9:30am celebration of Corpus Christi, I spoke about three challenges when it came to Mass.

- ◆ First challenge: To actually get to Mass.
- ◆ Second challenge: To be an *active participant* at Mass versus being a silent spectator.
- ◆ Third challenge: To go forth and *live* the Eucharist to be the presence of Christ in our homes and places of work and recreation.

I also said that living the Eucharist included being on the side of life. I named several life issues from womb to tomb: preborn life, immigration, end of life, climate control, capital punishment, and last but not least, racism, which all too often in the past was not included on the list of life issues.

I remarked that when a homilist spoke on these issues, he would often be accused of 'being political.' People say they didn't come to church to hear a sermon on politics.

All of the above life issues may be political, but they are likewise Gospel issues, moral issues. Therefore, for the Church or a homilist to be silent on these matters would be a grave mistake. It is the Church's right and duty to speak out on Gospel issues—or moral issues—especially life concerns. Our beliefs and views on these

things say a whole lot about who we are as Christians, and as Catholics. While we may not have *time* to be actively involved in *all* of the above issues, *all* of them should have a place in our hearts.

I expressed that, very sadly, the views of churchgoing Catholics on these issues are all too often formed by what they hear on television rather than by a reflection of what our Church teaches. How totally sad if we listen to FOX, CNN or MSNBC commentators and brush off Church teachings on 'hot-button' political but also moral issues. But, of course, we pastors can take our share of the blame for failing to impart to you the teachings of the Church on all these issues.

The race issue

In recent weeks, all the attention has been focused on the race issue following the death of George Floyd. In my homily, I referenced the 2018 Pastoral Letter by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) entitled "*Open Wide Our Hearts - the enduring call to love, a pastoral letter against racism*" (available on the internet).

The Bishops' Letter states: "*Despite many promising strides made in our country, racism still infects our nation*" (p.3).

Racism arises when we consciously or unconsciously hold some people as inferior to us. And even though we usually link racism to African Americans, it also applies to Hispanics, Native Americans, and all minorities, for that matter. Racism can also exist among ethnic groups and, as I pointed out in my homily, it can occur within our own ethnic group.

I shared with the congregation how I grew up in a racist household without of course knowing it. We lived on a farm and had hired helpers at different times. I recalled a man called John Keating who lived with us. His bed was above the shed that housed the horses. Looking back, we definitely looked upon John as inferior to us. Also, in the broader countryside of Irish society, we had farmers and 'cottage people'—those who often worked for farmers. Intermarriages between farmer and cottage families were seen as appalling, just like interracial marriages in this country 50 or so years ago.

The Bishops write:

Racism can often be found in our hearts - in many cases placed there unwillingly or unknowingly by our upbringing and culture. As such, it can lead to thoughts

and actions that we do not even see as racist, but nonetheless flow from the same prejudicial root. (p.5)

The Bishops' Letter affirms that all forms of racism are sinful. Years ago, racism was rarely, if ever, whispered in the confessional. At least in recent years, some people will confess to racist beliefs, tendencies or behaviors. But, most likely, most of us may be still blind to the racist tendencies that may exist within us. The Bishops' Letter states:

Every racist act - every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin - is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God. In these and in many other such acts, the sin of racism persists in our lives, in our country, and in our world. (p.4)

The letter goes on to say that racism exists in many forms today.

It can be seen in deliberate, sinful acts. In recent times, we have seen bold expressions of racism by groups as well as individuals. The re-appearance of symbols of hatred, such as nooses and swastikas in public spaces, is a tragic indicator of rising racial and ethnic animus. All too often, Hispanics and African Americans, for example, face discrimination in hiring, housing, educational opportunities, and incarceration. Racial profiling frequently targets Hispanics for selective immigration enforcement practices, and African Americans, for suspected criminal activity. (p.4)

The following statement by the Bishops seems so relevant after what we have witnessed in our nation in the past few weeks.

We read the headlines that report the killing of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement officials. In our prisons, the number of inmates of color, notably those who are brown and black, is grossly disproportionate. Despite the great blessings of liberty that this country offers, we must admit the plain truth that for many of our fellow citizens, who have done nothing wrong, interactions with the police are often fraught with fear and even danger. At the same time, we reject harsh rhetoric that belittles and dehumanizes law enforcement personnel who labor to keep our communities safe. We also condemn violent attacks against police. (p.5)

The call to listen to and to know the stories of our brothers and sisters

Listening to people's stories, especially people's struggle with failure and suffering, can be very powerful. Those of you who have been to a *Christ Renews His Parish* (CRHP) weekend know this. The same could or should be true when it comes to listening to the stories of racism experienced by African Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans. Pages 10-17 of the Bishops' Pastoral Letter powerfully describe the Native American, African American and Hispanic American experience.

These seven pages of the *Pastoral Letter* are tough to read but, in my opinion, very important for us to understand. It is amazing how good and supposedly churchgoing people could treat other creatures of God *so badly*. While current forms of discrimination and racism are not nearly as bad as in the past, they still exist in more ways than any of us would care to admit.

While I do appreciate and know that any country has the right to protect its borders, we can only imagine what it must be like during a police raid when a dad is taken away and his wife and small children are left terrorized at home. We can once again ask: What would Jesus do?—the question Christians must always keep asking, whether convenient or inconvenient.

I would really hope that all of you would take the time to read all seven pages (10-17) of the Bishops' Letter, which also names several Catholic Religious Orders and brave individuals who ministered to minorities during their darkest times.

Page 19 describes the ministry of Fr. Augustus Tolton, who was born into slavery and went on to become the first black priest in America. During his ministry, Fr. Tolton suffered greatly due to the racist behavior of those around him.

Some of you may know Sister (now saint) Katherine Drexel's legendary work amongst Native Americans and African Americans. By the time of her death in 1955, Sr. Katherine had more than 500 sisters working in 63 schools and had established 50 missions for Native Americans in 16 states. She also founded 50 schools for African American students, including Xavier University of Louisiana, the first and only Catholic University in our nation established specifically for African Americans.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How do you find yourself reacting to the protests that you see on television? I am referring to the peaceful protests. We all agree that the violence and looting are awful.
- ◆ Do you believe minorities in our nation have the same opportunities as white people?
- ◆ Do you believe racism is a real issue that needs to be addressed?
- ◆ Have you ever been guilty of racist remarks, jokes, attitudes or behaviors?
- ◆ In the 1980s when I was located in a parish in Winter Haven, there was a very nice golf country club in that town. Many members of St. Joseph's Parish where I served belonged to the club. In the 1980s, do you think you would have refused to join the club because of its racist membership policy?

I invite you to share with me other forms of racism that you have encountered or experienced in the past few years.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Sarah