

Living the Spirit “Father”

I renew this former writing for this weekend. It is a challenging one for all fathers, indeed, for all men in one way or another. Our society needs good men. So does the Church. At the same time, if you want to find these men, why not look around you? Celebrate this holiday by giving the best gifts – support and love for those to whom you are indebted for the gift of life in its abundant forms.

I have not written much about the Fatherhood of God in previous inserts. Indeed, it seems that with so many things taking place in parish life in June, there has been little recognition of the American holiday called Father’s Day. This insert will look to both the theme of God as Father and recognition of human fatherhood as worthy of celebration.

In doing some research in preparation for this theme, I was able to recall how the Scriptures speak of God as Father. In the Old Testament “father” is not the name given to God as often as it is in the New Testament. The Old Testament sees God more as Creator and Lord, as the personification of Wisdom and as a Redeemer of His people – most often in the sense of protection from hostile forces.

Isaiah reveals God as a Father who is everlasting – a very spiritual insight. Jeremiah sees God as Father of Israel, who brings his people back in mercy, a foreshadowing of later teaching about spiritual redemption. In the Psalms we read: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father from eternity to eternity.”

The New Testament has sources in abundance, for this teaching of God as Father is central to the revelation given us by Jesus. Jesus speaks of God as His Father. He speaks this way very often. His followers took note of this. This is best recalled when they asked Jesus how to pray and He taught them, saying; *OUR FATHER*.... Even as Jesus reveals the inner life of God as a life of unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, He teaches how the Father is a God of love. Jesus uses the childlike word: *Abba*, which we can translate as “dear father.” God the Father is revealed as the provider of our needs. He is a merciful Lord. He loves His creation so much as to send His only-begotten Son to give us everlasting life.

If all fatherhood takes its name from the fatherhood of God, what a wonderful truth we have for our reflection. Certainly the Apostles made this a part of their teaching. We see it in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and in later times in the Creeds that have their source in apostolic teachings.

At Mass we recite the Creed and begin with our belief in God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. We recite the prayer taught by Jesus to the apostles as our preparation for Holy Communion. In our living out of our faith we accept God as truly a loving Father for us and for the whole world. Christians can do no less as believers. [As an aside, I mention that this idea is not always stressed in the creeds of other faiths. Islam, for example, tends to focus on God as Almighty and merciful, not loving.]

Let us get to the second theme, human fatherhood as reflecting that of God’s. History looks at human society in its various forms as a patriarchal society. If today some see this as a lessening of the rights and dignity of women, it still remains a fact of history. What we need to understand is that fatherhood understood in its spiritual sense – derived from Christian teachings – in no way is meant to lessen the dignity of women. How can we

doubt the importance of motherhood? Who forgets how God chose a woman, Mary, to be the sole sinless member of humanity (Jesus Himself being seen as God incarnate)? One who reads history can see how Christian men came to live their faith by giving very serious spiritual dimensions to their way of life. St. Paul wrote of the duty of the husband (father) to love his wife. Perhaps that is why we have heard often that the best way for a man to love his children is to love his wife. If the Scriptures seem to ask women to unite their wishes to those of their husbands by a form of obedience, it demands of husbands (and of fathers) nothing less than love, a much more demanding virtue.

Fathers deserve to have from their families – wife and children – support for their fulfilling of their faith-centered duties. Love is meaningless unless it is a giving in return for love received. On Father's Day how does the believing Christian show this love to our fathers? I hope it is not by simply having a celebratory meal or the giving of the proverbial gift (a tool for work or a tie)? Let our gift be an offering to God the Father on behalf of every human father. Let it be sincere prayer.

Catholic literary sources are filled with advice for fathers. The challenges are great and well-intentioned fathers need to make sacrifices to be good at their vocation. Fathers must not try to escape their responsibilities. I speak of more duties than those that center in everyday social life. Fathers have to teach their children – more often by actions than by words. This means they are called to be men of prayer. [Participating in the Mass is important.] They must surrender to God's grace in following their true vocation. For them – as for us all -- the final call is to be a saint – does this surprise you?

Fathers themselves will need to pray for courage in this hectic world where the culture veers away from God and the things of God. In my reflection I would suggest that men look to the inspiring example of St. Joseph. Like him they are called to be fathers in the best sense – workers, protectors, selfless, courageous and loving. Love goes beyond the physical, as mature believers certainly know. It is demanding, but it the way to fulfillment of our common human destiny – to be joyfully with God, our loving Father. To every father I send my greeting: **Happy Father's Day!**

Fathers of the Church

It is a long tradition to speak of our priests as fathers to the faithful whom they serve. This comes from the fact that priests, as God's instruments, baptize and give the faith. They nourish this faith through Holy Communion, and heal the wounds of sin by Reconciliation. Thus they are seen as spiritual fathers. The chief priest of the Church, apart from Jesus Himself, is the Pope, who is commonly called "Holy Father."

Church theologians have for many years singled out the early teachers of the faith as "Fathers of the Church." Their writings have formed a great foundation for the Church's doctrines. Their influence has played an important role in many conversions to the faith. I think here of Blessed Cardinal Newman. But the early fathers are only the start of a long line of good Christian men – many of whom can be found among us. *Deo gratias!*

God love you always!
Monsignor David Morrison