

Sermon at Christ the King Parish and Our Lady of Dallas
June 16, 2013
11th Sunday Ordinary Time (Father's Day)
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This Sunday as we gather again this week to render worship to God we are reminded in our readings of two rather familiar biblical accounts. The first found in the Old Testament pertaining to the prophet Nathan's declaration that God had indeed forgiven King David for the murder of Uriah. The second from the Gospel of Jesus' own declaration of forgiveness to the humble prostitute who dared the contempt of the crowd to enter the Pharisee's home and to wash Jesus' feet with her tears.

Both accounts merit further study and careful analysis in their own right with much to offer regarding insight into the nature of sin and of God's forgiveness, if we let them. Yet, as I approach them this morning on Father's Day my own reflections center more around their relationship to fatherhood. In the story of King David, for example, it strikes me today as it has not in past readings that David's murder of Uriah was engendered by consequence of the word that he had, in fact, fathered a child by the wife of Uriah. Everything until that point in terms of their mutual, secret unfaithfulness all was fine and good. But, with David's awareness that he was now a father the secret would soon become known...and the evidence therefore had to be removed – certainly a sad commentary on fatherhood, no? That it becomes for King David, at least in this instance, the occasion of murder.

Similarly, in the gospel when reading this account on father's day of this sad and pitiable woman known and ostracized by all as a prostitute and as unclean I am left asking *a* question I just never thought to ask before, namely: "Where in the world was her father?" Certainly, something terrible must have happened such that her father was not able to prevent her from choosing such a life by providing whatever means necessary, financial or moral to keep her off the streets. Of course, there is no telling if the estrangement between the father and daughter was the result of his own bad parenting or her own stubborn disobedience. For that matter, it may simply have been the unfortunate fact that he had died much earlier and was unable consequently to be there for her. In

any case, in both accounts that of David and of this woman we find tragic and terrible instances of the failures and limitations of two fathers. And, in truth, on any given day of the week we need only to pick up the newspaper to be reminded that this terrible woundedness under which so very many fathers struggle persists as it has for ages ever since the fall of Adam and, tragically, with the same on-going negative repercussions for generations of their children. How many young people in our country in our state in our own home towns, for example, do not even know who their father is? And, how many single family homes are there that limit a child's exposure to a dad, even if he is known? And, how many children are there in our neighborhoods and our schools who enjoy at most brief experiences of his/her dad through life? I am told that 1/3 (or 15 million) children in the US are being raised today without a father. Not to mention the children of the 1.5 million dads who sit in prison. And, even in the most healthy of families, how the father nonetheless struggles to balance all of the pressures of the modern expectations of family life in a hostile, unchristian cultural and most difficult economic climate.

And so, when we will join millions of others across the country to call, or write, or, hopefully, even to visit in person with ours dads and to wish them a Happy Father's Day. To express gratitude and admiration for their having brought us into being, having nourished us, educated us, guided us, corrected us, and, in so many different ways, for having loved us. I also cannot help but think, especially given today's particular readings, that we are also invited to pray for our fathers and for all fathers that they may indeed be strengthened to live out this vocation of fatherhood. A vocation that when fully realized should ultimately make known to us, not in the abstract, but in the concrete and in the particular, the very divine paternity of God Himself.

For through Christ, we now know that God, the Creator of all, the omnipotent Lord and Master of the universe, the just judge who weighs the mountains in a scale and hills in a balance, is also to be called "Abba, Father." And in light of his unique revelation, everything man has ever known or suspected about God, his eternity, his omnipotence, his infinity, all of his manifold qualities and attributes, assumes the face of a Father.

Yet, God is not simply a Father by similitude or metaphor. Nor is it technically proper to speak of the First person of the Trinity as merely acting, like a Father. But,

rather, he is in fact Fatherhood itself. For Jesus reveals that from all eternity God the One and the Only Father begets God the one and the only Son, and empties/surrenders/sacrifices Himself as Father utterly and completely. To exist for the sake of this one Son, who in turn, receives all the Father is, and returns it in kind through a filial self-emptying. It is a perfect communion and is the perfection of love itself. And yet, this divine Father boundless in his compassion nonetheless wishes to extend and to share his supreme paternity with the whole human race, by means of adoption through his incarnated Son. In fact, it has been said that the whole of human Salvation is governed by our heavenly Father's intent to establish once and for all his universal fatherhood in whom all human fathers would then be able to share, participate, and manifest on earth.

Thus, the celebration of Father's Day assumes its full meaning only in the light of this revelation of the Trinity. Human fatherhood, whether biological or through adoption, receives its truest nobility in its capacity to reflect and share in the primordial paternity of the heavenly Father. As a consequence, every human father is to be honored even revered today and throughout the rest of the year because of the greatness of his vocation and by virtue of the divine paternity to which he bears witness in himself – what an awesome gift. To know that when a young boy or girl, prays the Lord's Prayer, or ever addresses any prayer to God the "Father," that they do so through the perspective/lens, of their human fathers. But also, what an awesome responsibility such that their whole sense of the God who nourishes, protects, advises, guides, chastises, provides, and yes, disciplines, is influenced by a mere man.

What human father can possibly live up to such a responsibility? Which male of our species could possibly fulfill such a lofty calling? Whereby we have the need this Father's Day not only to give thanks for the blessings our own father has been to us but also to seek through prayer the divine guidance, support and encouragement of fathers everywhere. One often hears requests for prayers on behalf of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. And, in truth, they are sorely needed. But, equally in crisis is the institution of fatherhood and therefore equally in need of prayer even as more and more men struggle to live up to its responsibilities and commitments.

Dear Fathers, perhaps the greatest gift one can possibly give one's children is the example of fidelity to the mom. To witness to the children in this way the very selfless

love of, concern for, and commitment to the other, that is God's own Fatherly love for them. And in like manner, demonstrating for kids, a sincerely lived faith. For a son or daughter, particularly an adolescent, to see his/her dad on bended knee or even in the line for confession must be one of the most powerful statements of faith one can possibly make. A recognition that to be a good dad, I too need help from above. And, to teach, our sons and daughters, that, despite the stereo-types of society, one's value is not in how much we make, not in what we drive, in what we wear, nor in where we live, but quite simply and completely in how much we love both God and each other. It is then that when a child is held in the arms of his dad, he feels more assuredly the comforts and protection and consolation of the Father in Heaven, as well. When he hears the corrective word/or action, of his dad, he is hearing and receiving even more clearly the corrective discipline of God himself. And when he witnesses the agony, the concern and worry of his dad, he witnesses more convincingly the agony, concern and worry of his heavenly Father for him or her, as well. And, finally, when he sees the joy and the happiness in the face and the smile of his dad, not because of anything in particular that he or she has accomplished, but simply because he or she exists, the son or daughter sees that very joy and happiness in the face of his or her heavenly Father as well.

I was speaking to a dad a while back about his son, a rising senior. I heard the dad bemoan the fact that the grades took a real dive last year. Of his hope that the boy will bring it up next year. About his pride that the boy is considering a military career. About his consternation that he could really help the boy in Spanish (a class he was failing), but that given the typical "father-son dynamic" the boy simply would not cooperate, insisting on trying to do it himself, even if it would mean failure. I was struck, as I have been many times before as a teacher, listening to such dads, at how wonderful a perspective they share. How close these men must feel to God. To will only the good for their children, to love them so utterly and completely, and yet, to be willing respect that fact, especially with the arrival of adolescence, that indeed there is an independent will involved and that has to be respected. An independence so beautifully ritualized in the Father handing his daughter away or toasting his son on a wedding day. What a great challenge!! But what a tremendous and awesome gift, as well!!! And what a wonderful cause this day to honor and to celebrate those men in our life who have striven to

embrace it, even as they have embraced us despite our independent and admittedly, sometimes stubborn and ungrateful, wills as well.

It is said that “One night a father overheard his son pray: Dear God, Make me the kind of man my Daddy is. Later that night, the Father prayed, Dear God, Make me the kind of man my son wants me to be.” To God be the honor and the glory and the power forever. Amen.