June 16, 2019: The Most Holy Trinity

My Dad has always been a fascinating man to me. Most of us, if we are honest with ourselves, are a mass of contradictions in how we come to address life in general. My Dad, on the other hand, was very much one of those people you would describe with, “What you see is what you get.” He tended to confront life and issues directly, with a consistent set of norms. He was not someone who deviated from what he considered right and wrong. He was also not someone who would act contrary to what he believed, just to make others happy.

I saw this in his faith journey. My Dad stopped going to church when I was about five or six years old. Over the years we talked about what it was that prevented him from going to Mass. He never got deeply into the issues with me, but it was quite clear that he had difficulties with some particular Church teachings. He needed to come to terms with those issues in his own way before he could return. But, at the same time, my Dad was always quite clear that he still believed in Christ and in God. He did not see himself as not being Catholic; he just needed to be true to who he was.

While he refrained from going to church, he never prevented us from going. In fact, he made it very clear that since it was important to Mom for us to be there, we would be at Mass with her every Sunday until we became adults. He also encouraged me in my own faith journey. God and the Church have always been important to me, and my Dad supported that wholeheartedly. We would talk a lot about the faith, and he was very knowledgeable about Catholicism. In his own way he helped me to grow and deepen my relationship with God. He was truly a big supporter of my journey to the priesthood. But, again, it was more about my journey than his.

But something fascinating happened when I was in college: Dad began going to church! I am not sure what happened or how he reconciled his differences with the Church because we never really talked about it. Again, my father was either all in or all out. And he did not merely come back! He began to help my Mom teach confirmation classes, he became an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and he eventually was selected to serve on the parish council. And until he became truly sick, I do not think my Dad missed Mass. But, he would not drive with my Mom to church for the simple reason that she took too long to leave after Mass. Mom has a tendency to need to talk to everyone in the Church before leaving, or at least it seems that way. My Dad had no patience for that once Mass was over; he was ready to go home and so he did.

I remember when I told my Dad in 1989 about my decision to go into the seminary. He was very clear that his only concern was my happiness. If I believed this was something I needed to do, then he was going to support me 100%. We talked about the decision and my firm belief that God was calling me. For Dad, that was enough. I know my Dad has always been proud of me, but I will never forget the look on his face on my ordination day. During the preparation of the altar, he got to carry up one of the gifts to the Cardinal. The smile on his face is something I will always treasure.

I also remember our conversations when he became truly sick. I was asked to go back to school after being ordained, but that meant leaving New England. Dad and I talked about what I should do. I did not really want to leave because I would be so far away from him and Mom. I would not be able to give my support during this time of need. But Dad was very clear in his response, “You were ordained to support the needs of the Church. If this is what the Church needs you to do, then you do it! You made a promise of obedience and you must be true to your word.”

My Dad also had no fear of dying. His faith was firm and his trust in the promises that Christ made us in his death and resurrection was unwavering. His only difficulty was in the prospect of not being with my Mom. The idea of being separated from her was really hard for him. But, at the same time, he understood his own condition and knew that it was going to happen. Rather than get angry about it, he accepted the truth that at some future time they would be together once more, and that was enough for him. His love for her was unbreakable.
Dad taught me a lot about life and faith: the most important thing in life is to be a person of integrity. It is important to know what you believe and to live it out faithfully. I might not have always agreed with my Dad, but I can say that my most deeply rooted beliefs in how I should live my life come from watching how he lived his.

Happy Father’s Day to all our wonderful fathers!

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian