June 21, 2020: Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mark Twain once quipped, “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” I think many of us fall into this trap of thinking we know better than our fathers. We look at him and wonder, why does he think the way he does? Why does he act the way he does? Why doesn’t he just understand who I am and what I truly need? Why does he seem so stuck in his way of thinking? And yet, as time goes forward and we gain more experience in life, we slowly begin to understand the man we wondered so much about.

My Dad was a pretty straight-forward guy. What you saw is what you got. He said pretty plainly what he meant; you never really had to guess at his meaning. He was also a man of his word. If he said he would do something, he did it. As he would say, “Your word is your bond.” He also always had clear expectations of us. The rules we had in our home were few, but they were to be followed without question. Dad was always clear about who was in charge, and he expected us to listen to him. And, finally, the most important rule in our house, as far as my Dad was concerned, was always to treat our Mom with respect. That rule according to Dad could never be broken—for any reason.

My Dad was a great dad, but not always the easiest person to have discussions with. He was a man of very strong opinions, which he would vigorously defend. He was also highly intelligent and extremely logical in how he presented his arguments. He usually had a plethora of information in his head to draw from as he presented his case. Dad did not have an issue with your disagreeing with him; in fact, he rather enjoyed it. However, you had better be able to back up what you were saying. He could be quite brutal intellectually in ripping apart your argument if it was not intellectually consistent or was factually inaccurate. An argument in our home many times was like a sparring match, and you wanted to be the one to get in the knockout blow. I have to admit, it was really kind of fun. But it was not always easy for people other than our family to comprehend what we were doing and why we were doing it.

It is important for us to come to an understanding of how we see our dad. That relationship can have a profound impact on how we will relate to God, particularly God our Father. My Dad, as already stated, was a man of fierce principles and determination. He was a man who was deeply loyal and and showed unconditional love to our family. He was fair in his dealings with people, and his expectations were usually reasonable and based on how he viewed the individual, and not the circumstances. As such, these traits went a long way in my beginning to understand who God the Father is. Because our understanding of God and our expectations of Him may be determined by our relationship with our human father, every father should strive to be an image of the Heavenly Father!

And so... what are the traits of God the Father? First and foremost is his unconditional love for each and every one of us! All that the Heavenly Father does reveals his love for us, and He shows that love in many different ways. First, our God is a God of sacrifice. But sacrifice is not about doing something painful: it is about putting the needs of others before ourselves. Sacrifice is not thinking about what is best for me, but rather, about what will help the other to truly become the person they are intended to be.

God always seeks what is best for us, and so He will not let us do whatever we want. Ultimately that leads to emptiness and despair. God does not want us to define ourselves, but rather, to discover the person He created us to be. He wants to help us discover our true gifts and talents, for it is there that we will find true joy and contentment.

Our God is also a God of humility—the humility that seeks to be a support to the other. Humility again is always about living a life that is other-centered. No action God has ever taken is about what is best for God: it has always been about what is best for his people. We see God’s humility most powerfully in sending his Son to die for us. God understood that in our human weakness we could never save ourselves. He had to act on our behalf to ensure our salvation.

God has been that rock and support in our deepest need, even during those times when we did not recognize what He was doing. God was quietly, gently there to support and guide us onto the right path, leading to true peace.

Obviously, I could go on and on about the traits that God our Father displayed throughout salvation history, and even in our own lives. The importance of all this is for dads to recognize who their true role model is—God Himself! As a dad you are simply called to unconditionally love, sacrifice for your family, grow in humility, and be that rock of strength. Being a good dad is not a job, but a vocation. It is a way of life that is so fundamental to the life of your children. Essentially you have only one real purpose as a dad, and that is to get your children to heaven.
Being a good dad is the greatest possibly blessing! God’s blessings this day to all our dads!

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,

[Signature]

Fr. Brian