

Fr. Curtis Miller June 20-21, 2021 Homily for the 12 Sunday of Ordinary Time

Happy Father's Day to all our fathers. Today we take time to thank our fathers and all father figures in our lives, offering prayers of gratitude to God, and asking that He help any fathers who are struggling. There will be a special blessing for fathers at the end of Mass today.

I'm blessed to have a wonderful father who brought up my sister and me to know the importance of our faith. He taught by example, taking our family to Mass every week, even though his work as a State Trooper kept him very busy. Fathers, never underestimate the impact that you have on your children by what you say, but most importantly by what you do and how you live.

One of the lessons that fathers ought to teach their children is the importance of integrity. The Christian writer C.S. Lewis said, "Integrity is what you do when no one is watching." It's easy to do the right thing when people see it and applaud us, but it can be harder when we know that no one will notice or give us credit. In fact, in those moments when we think that no one can see us, it's tempting to do bad things.

The ancient philosopher Plato recounts a myth, called the Ring of Gyges, about a man who discovers a magic ring that has the power to make him invisible when he wears it. He uses this newfound power to steal, to murder an enemy, and to commit all sorts of evils. When shielded from blame or consequences, we can be capable of great evil.

The internet today is a bit like a modern Ring of Gyges. We can feel safely anonymous online and say or do things we would never do in public. But as we often see in stories of scandals in the news, this anonymity is an illusion. Never do something online that you wouldn't want the whole world to know about. And this is true in the real world, too. We live in small towns here and know that word gets around fast.

At the end of time, at the Last Judgment, all will be revealed in the light of God. If there are things that we would rather not have everyone know, then we had better start working on repenting of them now. The point isn't that we do good and avoid evil because we're afraid of what other people will think. Rather our goal is to get to a point where we want to do the right thing simply because it is right and pleasing in God's eyes, even when there is no one else around.

It is also hard to do the right thing when there are people to see what we do, but they hate us for doing it. Jeremiah, from today's first reading, faithfully proclaimed God's word to the Israelites, but he was hated because his messages were unpopular. Yet Jeremiah persisted in speaking the truth. Why? Because he wasn't preaching to become popular; he only wanted to obey God. And in spite of his suffering, Jeremiah felt God present with him, strengthening and sustaining him in his difficult task.

This being Father's Day, let's consider a father who did the right thing even when he was persecuted for it. St. Thomas More, whose feast day we celebrate Monday/tomorrow, was a devoted father and faithful Catholic in 16th Century England. He rose to become Lord Chancellor, one of King Henry VIII's most powerful advisors. The king became enraged when the pope wouldn't allow him to divorce his wife and marry his mistress, so Henry broke away to form his own Church of England. Thomas More declined to support the king and resigned his position. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death by beheading for his defiance of the king.

Awaiting his martyrdom in prison, More wrote letters of advice and encouragement to his beloved daughter, Meg. In one letter he wrote, "[God's] grace has strengthened me until now and made me content to lose goods, land, and life as well, rather than to swear against my conscience... Therefore, my own good daughter, do not let your mind be troubled over anything that shall happen to me in this world. Nothing can come but what God wills. And I am very sure that whatever that be, however bad it may seem, it shall indeed be for the best." He was executed in 1535 and canonized a saint in 1935.

Our best model for doing what is right despite persecution is Jesus Himself. Though perfectly innocent, Jesus was cruelly killed on the cross, but He rose again, victorious in His resurrection. Jesus offers us an abundance of graces to help us to do what is right, too, even when no one is watching or when we are persecuted for it. None of us is perfect all the time, but if we accept Jesus' help, then we will be able to do better every day, and live lives that will be truly pleasing in God's eyes.