

HOMILY –12TH SUNDAY OT (A)

6/21/2020

Father's Day: I wish all fathers God's greatest blessings on you as we celebrate your special day.

Jesus reminds us today, as He did His disciples in the Gospel passage, of the tender care of His heavenly Father. He watches over us lovingly, faithfully, compassionately, as no one else can.

Today is a good day for us to recall our own fathers, grandfathers, uncles & father-figures who made us feel safe & secure in his love.

From time to time as fathers, I'm sure, you reflect on the privilege for giving life & nurturing that tiny little person into adulthood, helping your children progress in the knowledge & love of God & His Church. Awesome indeed. Father's Day should help us remember that.

In a few days I end my tenure as spiritual father at St. Columba & I would like to take a few moments to reflect on the way of life I've lived these past 50 years.

Let me say first of all, the call of God to be a Priest of Jesus Christ is absolutely awesome & it is as challenging & exciting & fulfilling today as any day in the past 2000 yrs.

My reflection today, is more personal, highlighting a few characteristics of the Priesthood. First of all, the Priest is the BEARER OF MYSTERY – the mystery of God's infinite love for us & as a Priest my task is always to reveal God's mysterious, unfathomable love in Jesus the Priest, & then to invite others to receive, accept openly, that love & spread it generously.

The Priest's special & ever-present role is to put a human face on the compassionate, unconditional, merciful love of the All Holy One. And to convey that human face I'll use a few down to earth terms that reveal the connection between the human & the divine.

- A) The Priest is an EAR....1) Listening intently to God's Word, first of all, letting it form his way of life in such a manner that his ministry & service can be a living witness of the God we cannot see.
2) But the Priest's ear has to listen intently too, the Priest listens to the people's words & worries, burdens & anxieties. The Priest is an Ear.
- B) As the Priest takes in God's Word it changes him, he has to let that Divine Word become flesh in himself, so that he becomes a living echo of the encouraging yet challenging Word, Jesus Christ, helping people to attune their hearts to the Heart of Christ.
- C) The Priest is a HAND, open to help lovingly the poor & the powerless, the needy & the straying souls. And Yes! He is the hand in the Confessional signaling, with outstretched hands, the overwhelming & renewing mercy of God. There in that Sacrament burdens are lifted, sins forgiven, peace restored.
- D) The Priest is also a WITNESS, the Priest is PRESENCE, the Priest is TEACHER, EVANGELIZER --- all that & more.

But where all these characteristics come together is in what we're doing now –CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST.

Here the Word of God is proclaimed. The Ear is engaged, we hear the Word & it molds us into the image of Jesus Christ, The Word made Flesh.

Here the hand is raised in the action of blessing & breaking & giving the Bread & Wine that have become the Body & Blood of Christ at the hand of the Priest for all of us.

I never seriously considered to be anything but a Priest. And I can say candidly, I've love it every day & I look forward to the rest of my life & dying as a Priest. But I'm not in a hurry to go home to God yet. As one of our deceased Bishops said: "I know heaven is my home, but I'm not homesick yet."

My greatest privilege is to stand at the Altar & hold my hands wide open knowing that at Mass the whole world is embraced in prayer, from east to west, north & south, men women & children, good & evil, Christian & not-Christian, believer & non-believer. The Eternal Priest died for all people & at every Mass, His death & resurrection, His gift of salvation for all people is celebrated. What a Mystery!!!

I have celebrated the Liturgy in times of great joy & great sorrow. I have rejoiced with you at the Baptisms & marriages of your sons & daughters. I was present to you when tragedy & sickness, death & grief came into your life.

I have entrusted your loved ones into the hands of our Heavenly Father & accompanied them, with the prayers of the Church, as they passed into eternal peace & joy.

What a marvelous, wonderful life !!!

It may seem from this that the Priest's life is impossible to live. From the world's point of view it is. But with God's grace all is possible.

It is an absolute mystery to me that God called me to be His Priest. I am all too human, always vulnerable, sometimes wounded, always in need of divine grace. I am grace on crutches. The grace of course, is God's initiative & sustaining power for my life as a Priest. The crutches point to the human, imperfect instrument, appointed to make Jesus Christ present in the world.

At the same time, I am humbled & thrilled to death when God uses me in the most ordinary circumstances to bring God's extraordinary love, peace, & joy to people

I thank God for entrusting to me the gift of the Priesthood & I thank all of you & all the people I met & ministered with over the past 50 years for accepting me so warmly, so openly, so helpfully. That too is mysterious.

I hope you have sensed my happiness here at St. Columba & my admiration of all of you for all you are & all you do to nurture & strengthen our Catholic Faith in this part of the Lord's Vineyard.

If I have appeared impatient, dissatisfied at times here at the Ambo, or one-to-one, I apologize & ask your forgiveness.

The fire in my gut, the vision of God's Kingdom of Peace & Justice, the vision of God's people living in love & working together overwhelms me. That vision has such exciting, wonderful possibilities for our world. I see Christ working every day through us – people of faith.

But I see also Jesus Christ being crucified out there in our streets, all across the world, such violence, hatred, & bitterness. All tearing down the Kingdom of God we're trying to build up.

Too many in the world have not heard of God's Kingdom & too many do not know the Kingdom's great possibility to change our world, & let the reign of God's love replace the reign of hatred & bitterness.

I hope that fire never fades in my belly, & I pray all of us can claim the vision of Jesus Christ for the world & let it lead us all in changing the world for the better – one person at a time. That vision of God's Kingdom will become a reality when you & I let it reign in our hearts before all else.

(This homily was given at St. Columba Catholic Church at the weekend Masses before I retired. P. Gallagher)