

The readings for today happily resonate with our Fathers' Day celebration. They lend deep meaning to it for all good dads, priests, teachers, coaches and anyone who has ever had a hand in raising a child. From the moment when our little ones first came into our lives, we've been part of the unfolding mystery of God's kingdom for them, as they have been for us. It's our privilege, allowing God to work with and through us, to help them grow up to be the unique expressions of God's love that they were created to be.

Like many of you, I'm sure, I can recall being present at my son's birth as if it were yesterday. Right after he was born, the nurses wiped him off, wrapped him in a blanket and handed him to me, looking at me as if somehow, I knew what to do next. Nothing could've been further from the truth.

I remember that he was as light as a bird and hollering his head off, with his eyebrows at the vertical. I got the impression I was expected to calm him down and make him stop crying. So, I said a little prayer, something along the lines of "Thanks, God. Now what do I do?" Well, we don't call God our Father for nothing, so I found myself being drawn like a magnet to just a couple of inches from Mike's face and singing *Happy Birthday* to him.

I'd been told newborns can't see, but I'm not so sure about that. Little Mike, wearing a terrified expression on his face that said "WHO or WHAT are YOU?" gave me the longest stare anyone has ever given me as I sang to him. Suddenly he just simply stopped crying, as if I'd flipped a switch. I suspect he recognized my voice, because we'd sung songs to him while Chris was still pregnant. I felt his tiny body relax in my hands.

Somehow, he knew who I was, and he knew he was safe. The mystery of our life together was beginning to unfold for us, and we both began to learn that it was good. Years later, I realized that just then I'd just been given my first lesson in how to respond to mystery: pray, do something and trust.

Of course, after you're born, there's a lot of growing up to do. Like the farmer in the gospel who watched his crops come up, much of my children's growth, as well as my own, happened well beneath my conscious radar. Looking at pictures of our family as we all matured fills me with awe and wonder at how it all came to pass.

That said, a farmer has to do what farmers need to do, and dads need to do what dads need to do, if there's to be a harvest. The readings leave no room for confusion about who's really doing the heavy lifting, though. We may find it difficult at times to discern how God's doing all that, but there can be no mistaking that it's God who's at work. In the simple words of the prophet Isaiah, "It is You who have accomplished all we have done."

All that dads and farmers, and everyone else, really needs to do is to cooperate with God in doing the work. For us dads, that cooperation presents itself as the challenge to help our children become aware of the wonderful work of God, as creation, which includes them, slowly evolves and expresses God's Love in sometimes amazing and sometimes very ordinary ways. As I suspect you might agree, that kind of insight and cooperation isn't likely to happen without prayer. It'd be like somehow always doing exactly what your wife wants you to do without her ever having to tell you what that is. Hard to say who'd be more amazed.

That evolution takes time – time itself is part of the mystery. Everyone and everything in creation needs to be addressed with the love and patience that allows it to become freely and completely exactly what it was created to be. There's a difference between lovingly engaging creation and thinking we can engineer it. Life may not always proceed the way we expect it should, much less according to our schedule. We do fit in, but we're not by any means in control of the universe. Let me tell you a little story about that.

One bright Spring day, when she was around three, I took our second child, Katie, who's now a nun, to our garden to plant bush bean seeds. I'd make the hole, she'd drop in the seed and then

we'd cover it together. When we finished planting the first row, I thanked her and said, "Look, Katie, there's our first row of beans!"

She looked up at me and asked, "Where?"

I was puzzled, and replied, "Right there. We just planted them."

"But where are the beans then, Dad?" Katie asked. "Why don't they come right up?" I chuckled at what she'd expected was supposed to happen, sat down on the ground next to her, and explained to her that life takes time. Growth begins in the dark warmth of the earth where we can't see it. When it's time, the beans poke up into the sunlight and grow into what they're meant to be.

"We need to make sure our beans get the right amount of water and sunlight too, Katie." I said.

"What happens if they don't?" she asked.

"Then growing into what they're supposed to be will be really hard," I replied. "If it's totally missing, the seeds will never become what they were supposed to be and might even die."

"That's sad," Katie said.

"I know, Katie," I told her. "That's why you and I have to take good care of the seeds we just planted, so they'll become the beans they were meant to be."

While little Katie pondered that, I continued. "It's kind of like the way it is with people – we're sort of like beans, too. The same God who made the beans made you and me. Just as beans start in the earth, you started in the warm darkness inside Mom, and now here you are, out in the sunlight. God planted you like a bean and asked Mom and me to take care of you. Our job's to help you receive and cherish the gifts of God that you need to grow up and become exactly the Katie God intended you to be."

Providing the gifts our children really need – love, kindness, discipline, Eucharist and our time, will surely give them a sacramental perspective on creation, allowing them to sense that they are in communion with God, all of God's creation, and their own deepest self. Doing so gives them the best chance they can have to grow up to be exactly who they were created to be, and that is worth celebrating!