

FATHERS AND FATHERS DAY

A few weeks ago we celebrated Father's Day. My dad died in 1992. He was short in stature, almost a foot below my height, but he was always a man I looked up to. He had the most rock solid faith of anyone I knew. I particularly admired the way he loved my mother. He always protected her heart.

Today we are experiencing a crisis in fatherhood. In his wonderful book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI makes the following observation: "It is true, of course, that contemporary men and women have difficulty experiencing the great consolation of the word *father* immediately, since the experience of the father is in many cases either completely absent or is obscured by inadequate examples of fatherhood."

This remark occurs in the context of his profound reflection on the opening petition of the Lord's Prayer. Fathers are called to be conduits of life. In this men share imperfectly in the Divine Paternity. Women also share in God's Fatherhood as mothers. As dads and moms we participate in the Heavenly Father's creative process. God's Fatherhood, of course, is fundamentally spiritual and supernatural. Pope Benedict affirms that the essence of the Father is love. This dimension of fatherhood is often obscured today by the overemphasis on biology and self.

This leads us to understand why the terms "fatherhood" and "priesthood" are used synonymously in the Bible. Examples abound. In Judges 17:10 a man named Micah invites a Levite to reside with him: "Stay with me," Micah said to him. "Be a *father* and *priest* to me." Subsequently, a delegation of Danites give a similar invitation: "Come with us and be our *father* and *priest*" (Jdg 18:19).

St. Paul expressed his spiritual fatherhood in his First Letter to the Corinthians 4:14-15: "I am writing you this not to shame you, but to admonish you *as my beloved children*. Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many *fathers*, for *I became your father* in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Similarly, he wrote to the Thessalonians: "As you know, we treated each one of you as a *father treats his children*, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who call you into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:11-12).

This discussion brings me to another point in this essay, our priests. In recent years these spiritual fathers have borne the unpleasant revelations of the tragic misbehaviors of a few – often many years ago. Yet, they often came under suspicion or were condemned by association. Nevertheless, we have all been blessed by the loving care of so many faithful priests. They put in long hours in an environment of our unreasonable demands.

When I was in California I had the privilege of being the confidant of my beloved pastor, now deceased, Msgr. Robert J. Stein. At the time I was the Managing Partner and General Manager of a very large insurance agency, which allowed me to evaluate the complexity and demands of the two positions. I was amazed! It was no contest. I used

to say, “Father, you must feel like you are Solomon with the baby in one hand and the sword in the other, ten times a day.”

Father’s Day is a reminder to appreciate our dads, to strive to be better dads, and to express our gratitude to our priests. In particular we need to help them with the financial burdens of administering a large parish. Tithing is a step in the right direction. Furthermore, we need to frequently express our gratitude, but especially surround them with our prayer. They are our front line troops who are often under assault in ways we cannot imagine. We need to pray for them daily.