

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Father's Care and Love

June 18, 2023.

The readings for this Sunday present the People of Israel encamped before Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:2-6a). God tells Moses, "**Remind the people of my care for them**, how I defeated the Egyptians and bore up the People of Israel on eagles wings and brought you here to myself." Paul reminds the Romans of God's special care for his people when he tells them and us that Jesus died for us, so that we sinners, might **be reconciled with God**. The just man died not just for good people, but even and especially for sinner (Romans 5:6-11). The Gospel reading (Matthew 9:36-10:8) presents the Lord filled with grief when he saw how much the crowds need him and how few people there were to continue his work. Jesus then begins the Apostolic Church. He called the Twelve apostles **to carry his presence to the world**.

This Sunday is Father's Day. All Fathers, birth fathers, adoptive fathers and priests, are reminded of their mission to bring the caring protective love of the Lord to their families. In the Walt Disney's classic The Little Mermaid, a mermaid, the daughter of King Triton, the Lord of the sea, falls in love with a human prince. Deceived by the false promise of a wicked sea witch, the mermaid ends up selling herself into the witch's power through her efforts to win the prince's love. When King Triton hears of his daughter's plight, he rushes to her rescue by sacrificing his own freedom, to be locked up in the witch's prison in order to set his daughter free. It is a beautiful story, and it rings true - there is something right and noble about sacrificing oneself for the good of others. King Triton's love for his daughter was a natural love. Every father would do the same, and we all have experienced the beauty of this natural, self-sacrificial love at work in our fathers. We are created in God's image so deep down we all want to love like that. But God's love goes much deeper than emotions, and, Christ takes this natural love and super-naturalizes it. Christian love extends this self-forsakenness not just to members of our immediate family, but to everyone. That's why our Church is called "Catholic," which in Greek means "universal." This is also why everyone calls a Catholic priest, "Father": he is a living image and representative of God's supernatural, unconditional, universal love for all his children.

Back in 1993 the Bishops of the United States issued a pastoral message, Follow the Way of Love, in which fathers were commended and encouraged. The bishops wrote: More and more, fathers have been discovering how their involvement in parenting enriches both their children and themselves. ... We urge men to interpret their traditional role of provider for a family in more than an economic sense. Physical care of children, discipline, training in religious values and practices, helping with school work, and other activities can and must be provided by fathers as well as mothers. The role of the mother can be expressed with the concept of being the life-giving-nurturer. The nurturing which her body gives the child from conception through nursing becomes her basic relationship with her child. The good mother does not just teach her child like the school teacher, she feeds her child the basic messages of life. The role of the father can be expressed with the concept of being the life-giving provider. Work is important, but providing for the family means a lot more than a pay check. The good father provides a Christian life for the child to integrate into his or her life. The good father makes real the caring, protective love of the Lord. On eagle's wings the Lord delivered his people from the evils of Egypt. When he keeps his home free from the immoral influences of modern society, the good father protects his children from the evils of the world with eagle's wings. He cares for his children with the sacrifice of his day knowing that his life is richer when it is given for others, particularly for his own family. The good father is sent to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and he begins with his children. We pray for all fathers to be good fathers. May they provide for their children the care of the Father of us all.

Currently we are watching a Chinese drama called "Daddy Dearest"(超能老豆). It tells of the different types of relationships between children and their father and how the behaviour of the father affects the growth of the child. There's the father who works hard to make sure his son will have a successful career but does not focus too much on bonding. There's the father who is willing to put his job as a top architect on hold to take care of the children at home when he realized how much he missed out

on their growing up because of his frequent travels for business conferences. There's a divorced single father who focuses much time on making money thinking wealth can provide for every need of his son who wants nothing more than a hug from his father. There's a father who gets angry every time his child causes trouble at school and beating up the child is his only way of discipline. There's the suicidal mother who is deserted by her husband and finds it hard to play the double roles of a mother and a father. It is said, "It takes a village to raise a child", so it takes a community to teach someone how to be a father. As the drama develops, all these fathers are gradually moulded and transformed to be better parents through the interaction with their own children, teachers and other parents at a tutoring school their children are attending. These fathers are groomed by their community to become more mature, responsible and they learn to have a loving relationship with their children for the good of the children. What is our relationship as children of our Lord and God, Our Father? Do we spend time to talk with and listen to Him or do we just tell Him what we want? Do we give our service by doing all kinds of ministries, attending all kinds of meetings but never have time for quiet adoration and prayer in the presence of the tabernacle? Do we donate a lot of money to the church but never have the love for our neighbours or time to visit the sick? How close are we to Our Father? Do we love Our Father as Jesus taught us to love?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as Pope Francis twitted: "**God is Father and looks after you like a father. As the best of fathers, he does not look at the achievements you have not yet reached, but the fruits you can still bear. He does not keep track of your shortcomings but encourages your potential. He does not dwell on your past, but confidently bets on your future. This is because God is close to us. He is close with mercy and tenderness. In this way, God accompanies us: with closeness, mercy, and tenderness.**" This is the kind of love that burns in Christ's heart, the kind that brings families back together, that ends wars, that conquers evil. He gives us the grace to love like that, if only we will put his grace into action. The quickest way to do so is simply committing to do the Christ-like thing, to do good to everyone at all times, without looking for anything in return. When we look for recognition or payment for doing right, we are not really free to experience the transforming power of Christian love. Instead, we start to get bitter and harbour grudges, making ourselves and those around us miserable. But if we do the Christian thing seeking only to please Christ and follow him, then we experience a huge sense of relief, joy, and internal peace, because we are freed from the slavery of other people's approval. Go ahead and spend time making a good meal for the family, even though no one will say thank you - do it for Christ; he won't forget. Go ahead and help someone with their homework or their work project, even though they don't appreciate it - do it for Christ. Go ahead and work hard, giving your best, even though your boss or your coach or your teacher has something against you - do it for Christ. Go ahead and serve the weak, the poor, the unpopular even though the in-crowd will laugh at you - do it for Christ. If we are good advertisement for the church, the many non-believers with whom we come in contact may go a step further and discover Christ as a result. It is no small challenge to be Christ's messenger as it demands great effort and hard work. It is no small challenge to be a good father in this world where the presence of Christ is diminishing day by day. But it is through Christ who will unite us all to His Father, our Father.