



Homily for 7/24/22

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

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*Crisis of Fatherhood*

Who is a father?

Fatherhood is not just a biological fact. It is the taking up of a responsibility. Fatherhood must be chosen. There is a biological difference between mothers and fathers. But there is more importantly a psychological/spiritual difference. The mother is the one who represents immanence. The father is the one who represents transcendence. The image I give is that of pregnancy and birth. The mother is known to the child first. There is a symbiotic relationship between them in the womb. The child eats what the mother eats, drinks what she drinks, feels what she feels – there is an immanence, a closeness, that is innate. The father, on the other hand, is always ‘the other’. He is the faint voice heard through the veil of flesh who speaks from the outside and is wholly other. When the child is born, they raise the baby to the mother’s breast to be pressed against familiar skin. But then it comes time for the father to hold the child, to touch the baby for the first time. To claim the child. The wholly-other claims the child for his own. This is why the father represents transcendence and it is why he represents God to us, who is wholly-other.

The father is always the one who chooses us from the outside. We take a mother’s love for granted. But a father’s love for us must always be chosen. While there are of course psychological/spiritual effects of maternal wounds in the soul, there are much more frequent and much more profound father wounds that afflict us.

There have been several studies that have shown that the role of the father is very powerful in the spiritual formation of his children. To sum these studies up, in determining the future choice of faith in adult children, the father’s faith disposition is the most important indicator. No matter how devoted or undevoted the mother is, it is the father’s expression of faith that has the most sway over children’s own faith choices in life. This is very curious to note, especially as we see a crisis of fatherhood in our society, we are seeing a concomitant crisis in faith.

It stands to reason that if we are to have a revival of faith, we are going to have to have a revival of authentic fatherhood. We have to acknowledge that there have been bad men, who have made for bad fathers. We have to face our own father wounds and bring them to the healing power of God the Father. We have to teach our sons what it means to be a good father and form them rightly, for the sake of our daughters (their future wives) and our grandchildren (their future children). This is an imperative for our age.

Where do we find this healing? We first have to know the heart of God the Father who is the source of all fatherhood. In the Scriptures we get a glimpse of the heart of the father. The father is the one who wills the true good of the child. *“What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”*

The heart of the father is also revealed in the first reading. The father is traditionally the one who metes out discipline. This is because he is the revealer of Justice to his children. Justice is not a bad word. Fathers are often called upon to arbitrate disputes, to sort of ‘sit in court’ upon the fairness of some issue between children – to give to each his own. He is the one before whom one pleads a cause. I remember growing up, when we would get in trouble we would hear the phrase, “wait till your father comes home!” And then we would have to explain ourselves to him. He was the objective party. He was voice of reason in the passionate moment. He would mete out just



punishments when there was need of discipline and he would give reprieve if we were able to convince him of our innocence or lack of culpability. The father is the domestic judge.

In the reading from Genesis, we hear a similar familiar courtly scene of Abraham standing before God to plead the cause of the innocent people in the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. God has come to judge the issue. *"I must go down and see whether or not and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me."* Abraham dares to approach the Father to plead his cause. But look at the audacity and courage of Abraham in doing so. He knows the heart of the Father, and therefore, he knows the Father's love for his people. He acknowledges the wickedness of evil but also the salvific will manifested in God's loving heart. God is willing to spare the whole place for the sake of the innocent few. What unfolds is a probing of the compassionate, loving heart of the father.

Abraham presses the cause. If God is willing to spare the whole place for fifty innocent people, would he do the same for forty-five? For forty? For thirty? For twenty? For ten? Each time the answer of the Lord, *"For their sake, I will not destroy."* It, of course, begs the question – how far is the Father willing to go? Should Abraham have pressed the issue all the way to one? What would have been the father's response? If your heart says anything more than *"I will not destroy it,"* your heart does not know the Father.

God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live. Jesus further reveals the heart of the father in the parable of the prodigal son. The faithful father waits for the return of his son. When there is even the slightest movement of humility breaking down the son's pride, the father runs out to meet him. Now, the mercy of God is not in opposition to his justice. Just like a good father, he is not afraid to discipline of a wayward son to correct him, to lead him into right conduct. Hebrews 12:6 *"For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts."* If the sons only turns back in humility before the Lord, He is there to accept them again.

The question before us, then, is whether or not we are willing to engage God the Father with confidence in His authentic fatherhood. Will we plead before Him with courage and persistence for the forty, the thirty and even the one? Will we knock on his door and ask for an outpouring of His Spirit of fatherhood on this world that has seemed to have lost its way? This is the revival we need in our day. Do not be afraid to approach God the Father - but do it with proper filial devotion and piety. The Father will respond in kindness and mercy to the soul who pleads in humility and repentance. No matter what your father wound might be, whatever misperceptions you have of a father's love, not matter what bad examples experienced, this is a place of healing if you listen to His saving word. 1 John 3:1 - *"See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are."* Romans 8:5 *"For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father."* Galatians 4:4-7 *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of this Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."*