

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time Weekend “A Week with the USCCB and then Father’s Day”

Bishop Frank Schuster

I spent all last week at the June Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. What is it like, you might ask? Beyond the shock of a cardinal introducing themselves to me in the hallway, as if they need introduction, I’ll say this about bishops. We are human. Blessed to be successors of the Apostles, yes, however, every one of us are like you, we are sinners who need Jesus. This weekend, Jesus calls the twelve, to shepherd the New Israel. They had their flaws too. James and John were overly ambitious. Thomas struggled in his faith. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times; not to mention Judas, who ended up betraying Jesus altogether.

The mystery is Jesus stubbornly chooses human beings to sanctify his people. God also doesn’t call the equipped, he equips those he calls. The rub is, for it to all work, the called must answer. That is how it is with bishops. That is how it is with all the baptized. I can say this though after attending three of these assemblies so far in the short time I have been a bishop. Bishops understand all too clearly the challenges in our church and world today, even if we don’t always agree on solutions. Imagine that. However, it was encouraging that we begin our assemblies with adoration of the blessed sacrament, we celebrated Mass each day, and we didn’t forget to pray for each other and for you throughout the week of very long meetings. For those of us who follow what bishops do, thank you for your prayers. It is good to be home.

This Sunday we also celebrate Fathers’ Day. How did Fathers’ Day originate? The legend is a woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd of Spokane, Washington, was moved by a sermon that was given on Mothers’ Day in 1909. She was one of six children raised by a widower, and so her reaction to the sermon was, “what about dad?” The fruit of that experience inspired her to lead the charge for our culture to set aside a Sunday each year to celebrate Fathers’ Day. It took a year of campaigning for it; however, her effort succeeded quickly when the State of Washington established Fathers’ Day as a holiday in 1910. This day is a bright light in the history of Washington State because we were the trail blazers with this holiday even though it wasn’t until 1972 before it received federal recognition from the President of the United States. The businesses that make greeting cards and companies that make men’s clothing, ties, and perhaps socks, may have had something to do with it as well.

However, Fathers’ Day this year is a poignant one for me and my family because our dad passed away only last month, and this is the first Fathers’ Day in our lives without him. I had a surreal moment in the grocery store a couple weeks ago. I was zipping in and out for something, but the greeting cards caught my eye. It was a weird moment when I saw the Fathers’ Day cards display. There was that knee jerk moment, “Oh, I should get a card” followed by, “Oh, wait.” And then, I was surprised at how fast grief can hit out of nowhere. I quickly bought whatever I needed to buy and walked out thinking grief sucks.

I must say through that, on Fathers’ Day, the grief is also a consolation in that it is the rawest evidence I can point to right now that my dad did his job. He was without question a very good dad. Some of you here have dad’s still living. Some of you are like me and pray for the

repose of the soul of your dad. Some of you have positive feelings about your dad, living or dead. Some of you find thinking about your dad to be really challenging. Some of you have father figures who have helped shape you throughout your lives. Some of you have been blessed with the realization that at the heart of what it means to be a dad has nothing to do with DNA but everything about relationship. Just ask St. Joseph.

And so, I think the insight I gave you at the beginning about bishops, called to be spiritual fathers, rings true about dads. Dads are like you and like me. They are blessed by their vocation, however like you and like me, dads are also sinners who need Jesus just as much as we do. In our Gospel Reading, we are confronted with the mystery of how Jesus stubbornly chooses human beings to sanctify his people. It would have been far more efficient for Jesus to simply do all the work himself. However, that isn't God's game. He stubbornly insists on spreading his infallible grace throughout the world through very fallible people. The twelve disciples are like us in that way. God doesn't call the equipped, he equips those he calls. The rub is, for it to work, the called must answer what is expected of us in whatever calling we are called to. That is how it is with bishops. That is how it is with parents. That is how it is with all the baptized. The truth is many of us succeed in our vocations, thanks be to God. However, some of us don't. All of us need each other's prayers and support, and all of us need Jesus and the opportunities he offers us for forgiveness and, at times, even redemption.

How does God equip us with the grace we need to persevere in our vocations? I think the better question is how do we best access the grace God offers us since God is literally the ocean in which we swim? This is the best insight I have about this right now. When you gather four hundred bishops together for a weeklong meeting, you have about four hundred different points of views about any topic. What makes it work is how much we pray together throughout the week. Before we talk about anything, we have a morning with adoration of the blessed Sacrament, with the sacrament of reconciliation offered to those who want, followed by Mass. Each session begins and ends with prayer, and we pray the liturgy of the hours with each other as well. I mention this because prayer has a wonderful way of keeping us to our best natures as well as giving us the time we need to prayerfully consider other points of view.

And so, how do we best access the grace God offers us to answer whatever calling or vocation we have in the life of the Church? The answer it seems is to carve out as much time during the day as we can to pray. If you have a stressful job and a tough meeting to walk into, try escaping to someplace quiet and pray a quick chaplet of divine mercy beforehand and see how much better that meeting goes as a result. Prove me wrong. If a difficult conversation is needed with a family member, the same thing applies, try carving out time beforehand for prayer, and see how much better that conversation goes. I know that for me to be a good bishop, everything starts with prayer. I believe the same thing applies with every vocation in the life of the Church and life of a family, be it a mom, dad, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, niece, the list goes on.

This weekend, Jesus calls the twelve, to become spiritual fathers who will shepherd the New Israel. They had their flaws. So do we. However, consider that God wants to sanctify the world around you through you in whatever vocation you are called to. What does that look like for you, for me, and for us this coming week?