

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Father’s Day”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, this Sunday we celebrate Fathers’ Day. How did Fathers’ Day originate you might ask? 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, like so many of you, since my dad passed away several years ago, Fathers’ Day can be a mixed bag of emotions as I am sure it is for some of you. For instance, for me, bumping into the Fathers’ Day cards on display at the grocery store can bring back memories of year after year trying to find the best card that would hopefully make him laugh. Those kinds of memories can trigger inside of me both a little grief and happiness too. It is interesting how the older we get it is possible to experience so many emotions all at once.

And so, on Fathers’ Day, we have the opportunity now to voice our gratitude for our dads and the dads all around us who sacrifice so much for their family. Indeed, some of you here have dad’s still living and haven’t made a phone call yet. Better get that done after mass! Some of you are like me and pray for the repose of the soul of your dad. Meanwhile, although I think most of us here have positive feelings about their dads, living or dead, it should also be acknowledged that some of us here today may find thinking about their relationship with their dad to be challenging. There are also some of us here may have been adopted for that matter and never met or forged a relationship with your biological father. However, it is a good reminder that sometimes being a father has nothing to do with DNA but everything about relationship, love and sacrifice. Just ask St. Joseph.

My friend, all of this helps us appreciate more the Gospel reading this weekend. Jesus reminds us how much our Father in heaven loves us. He goes so far as to say every hair on our heads has been counted. Granted this is easier for some heads than others; however, the point is clear. Our Father in heaven isn’t just a father figure; he is a dad figure too. Indeed, when Jesus teaches us to pray to our heavenly Father, the word he chooses is “abba”, a word that literally means “daddy”. If he wanted to keep it to “father”, he would have used the word “abuna”.

And so, on Father’s Day, as we celebrate our fathers, and pray for our fathers, and our father figures, it is a good time to ask ourselves, what is our relationship to our Heavenly Father like in our prayers? Is he a stern and grumpy father to be feared or is he a father who is

irrational in his love for you. Ask the prodigal son for his opinion on that. Ask yourself, how much life would be better if we let God's irrational love break through into our hearts?

What does that irrational love look like? One of my favorite memories growing up was our trips to grandma and grandpa's house. They didn't have a tv in their living room, just a piano. And, after dinner, our custom would be for all the kids to take turns playing something on the piano for them. My sister was the professional piano player able to pound out Debussy flawlessly. My brother and I were less talented. But the thing about grandma and grandpa was, you could play chop sticks, and they would enjoy it more than a night out at the symphony. It is that kind of irrational love that our Father in heaven has for you and me. So often, the only thing that gets in the way of being loved like that is the guilt that comes from sin and no shortage of pride.

And so, my friends, what does it look like this Father's Day to truly celebrate our Heavenly Father who loved us first? What are ways we can honor our dads who are still living? What are ways we can pray for our dads who have passed and right now are praying for us? And for those with complicated emotions surrounding relationships with our fathers, what does it look like to trust our heavenly Father, who with the Son and Holy Spirit wants nothing short of our eternal salvation? You and I both know that we can't save ourselves. We can't. We need Jesus. Only Jesus can show us the way to his Father's house. That is where we all want to be.

And so, I thought it would be pleasant to end this homily for a blessing for our dads. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Heavenly Father,
you entrusted your Son Jesus,
the child of Mary,
to the care of Joseph, an earthly father.

Bless all fathers
as they care for their families.
Give them strength and wisdom,
tenderness and patience;
support them in the work they have to do,
protecting those who look to them,
as we look to you for love and salvation,
through Jesus Christ
our rock and defender.

Amen.