

HOMILY

The Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary time *Father's Day*

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Welcome, on this Father's Day 2007.

Some years back, Bill Cosby wrote a book simply entitled Fatherhood. (If you ever get a chance to read it, I suggest you do.) A story that Cosby tells is the difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day. He insists that Mother's Day is a much bigger deal because mothers are more organized. Mothers say to their children, "Now here is a list of what I want. Go get the money from your father and you surprise me on Mother's Day. Can you do that for me?"

For Father's Day, Cosby, a father of five children, relates, "I give each of my kids \$20 so that they can go out and buy me a present—a total of \$100. They go to the store and buy two packages of underwear, each of which costs \$5 and contains three shorts. They tear them open and each kid wraps up one pair; the sixth pair of underwear going to the Salvation Army. Therefore, on Father's Day, I am walking around with new underwear and my kids are walking around with \$90 worth of change in their pockets." How many of you dads could relate to that?

On this Father's Day, I suggest we focus our attention on the 20th verse of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Paul writes:

*"I have been crucified with Christ;
yet I live, no longer I,
but Christ lives in me."*

Here is the ultimate secret of being a good dad and a good mom and a good grandparent and a good son or daughter. Ultimately it is the secret of being a good follower of the Man from Nazareth. "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

What does Paul mean when he says he has been “crucified with Christ?” Certainly, it doesn’t mean that he has been crucified literally with nails in his hands and feet. No! What is crucified is Paul’s old way of living. His pride and self-righteousness. His sense of moral superiority. His disdain for people who did not think as he did and worship as he did. It is amazing that the Paul, who persecuted people because of their religious beliefs, could be the same Paul who wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:

“If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongdoings. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.”

It’s hard to believe that Paul the persecutor wrote these words. The old Paul was dead. Now there was a new Paul fashioned after the character of Christ—loving, forgiving, accepting, caring.

That’s what we all need, isn’t it? To be crucified with Christ and to become new persons in him. It’s true not just of dad but all of us! Men and women, married and single, parents, grandparents, those living alone and for those who are in a situation where they are responsible not only for the physical needs of others, but also their spiritual and emotional needs as well. There is that special need for a Christ-like love, a love more giving than the love we were born with.

Perhaps you heard about the man whose father retired at the age of sixty-four. He wanted to buy his dad something to thank him for all his hard work and sacrifice. As he shopped, he realized there was nothing he could buy that could thank him enough. His father had taught him through his own hard work and faith in God that the greatest gifts come from the heart and not the store. So that night, he sat down and wrote a list of “thank yous” to his father for all he had done for him. He left it on the kitchen table for his dad before that final day at work.

THANK YOU, DAD...

*For waking up every morning when it was still dark outside
and going to work, while we slept in our warm beds.*

For wearing that ugly paper tie I made you in first grade.

For teaching me how to pray.

*For loving my mother with all your heart.
For teaching me I can never say "please" and "thank you" too often.
For giving me a hug when I badly needed one.
For building that voice inside me that said "no" when I was tempted to
get in a car after I had been drinking.
For giving me life even after you lost a son.
For helping me buy my first car.
For being a wonderful grandfather.
For telling me it's okay to cry.
For being my hero, for being my friend.*

Being a loving father does not come naturally. It is hard work. Being a loving follower of Christ, again, doesn't come naturally. It, too, means hard work. It means ignoring your own needs at times so that you can focus on the needs of others. Some of us had fathers who were able to do that. Others of us had fathers who could not.

And what is the difference? The difference is between the ability to give unconditional love versus conditional love. Conditional love is based on accomplishment or performance. Unconditional, Christ-like love says, "I love you for being you. Not for your achievements. Not for being an honor student, not for being outstanding at sports. I love you without reservation simply and solely because you are my child." That is the love we receive from Christ, and that is the love we need to transfer to our children.

If somehow you never received that kind of unconditional love from your parents, I hope you will receive it today from Christ. You don't have to be a super-achiever. You don't even have to be a super-Christian. God loves you because you are you. Friends, that kind of love doesn't come naturally to most of us. What many of us need is to be reborn. Not in a doctrinal sense, but in a practical one. We need a new heart. We need new emotions. We need to die to our old self and to be made new to the love of Jesus Christ. That's true of dads; that's true of moms; that's true of single men and women.

St. Paul writes, "*I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.*" So may it be with you and me.