

June 18-19, 2016

Thoughts from the pastor,

Happy Father's Day! This and Mother's Day are always fun for me because of the blessing that happens with the children at the Masses. I don't know if you have noticed but there are a lot of new children in the parish. It is exciting. Their occasional squeaks and cries are music to my ears. I am still recovering from twelve years in the seminary where all the Masses were attended almost exclusively by adult males. Seminaries serve their purpose but that part of the structure drove me crazy.

As a part of the celebration of Father's Day we have the I-80 Collar Series, slow-pitch soft-ball game this Sunday. For many of you it should bring back memories of attending ballgames with your dad and sitting in the heat with the hopes of hearing some of his stories about life. I had many opportunities to hear stories but it was while we were fixing fence or other great adventures in farming. But I hope you have a great time with your fathers this weekend.

This is an appropriate time to write a little about what it means to be a Father of another kind since we have just gone through the First Mass for one of our own becoming Father Joe Sund. I share this kind of fatherhood with Fr. Sund but have a thirty-eight year head-start on him. It is very similar role to what the father/dad of any family must be. Being a father is not just about generating new life with the participation of a woman. As priests we do that through baptism. The church is the bride/wife that brings the new life into the world but the priest/Father participates after the natural birth to help a person be born again. Jesus outlines this in the third chapter of the Gospel of John.

That rebirth is just the beginning. Just as a man who procreates but doesn't nurture can be a terrible father, so a priest who baptizes but doesn't continue to provide spiritual nourishment and guidance would be a terrible Father. Dads and Fathers take their role of Father from God Himself. God shows us the way. There are many critical lessons we must learn from God the Father. We must learn to love knowing that we may be rejected. We must learn to be fair and still help each new life develop in its uniqueness. We must model and teach justice but always be ready to show mercy. We can celebrate the joy of a child becoming an amazing part of the family through their participation in the plans of the family and also mourn the times when a child grows farther and farther away from the family. For even though priests are responsible for assisting in people's development, we cannot force it because it would destroy the first lesson of love by replacing it with control.

Even though there is a great deal of overlap between the role of dad and Father there is one main difference that a priest must always be focused on. We always have to be focused on preparing the child for eternity. As Fr. Corapi used to say before his fall, "In the end we will either be in heaven or hell, period." A dad's first responsibility is to help his child get a life of their own. Whether the child is a potential rocket scientist or limited so much that bringing joy to others is their only gift, the dad must help them attain that goal. While doing that dad must keep the children focusing on the end game of heaven or hell or they will be misled. So a dad focuses on the present with his eye on the eternal.

The priest focuses on the eternal while trying to help people so they don't get too bogged down in the past, present, or the near future. This is one of the hardest parts of being a Father/priest. Some people live in the past. Some are so entrenched in it that they get upset if you make any changes. Some people live in the present and can become oblivious of the warnings of the past or the hopes

of the future. Some people live with only the future in mind and can risk throwing away the beauty and glory that has been created by the people who came before them.

A Father/priest must help keep the family together while dealing with each individual's realities in mind. It is a daunting task for a father of one or a dozen children. It is crazy for a priest or two trying to guide a few thousand people. When I read the Gospels and see passages in which the apostles are arguing or the crowds are ready to kill Jesus for totally different reasons, I understand why he wept for his family. I also understand why he was willing to die for them. You can't take on the role of Father without knowing that sacrifice is the name of the game.

No priest can do it all by himself. It is similar to the struggles of a single parent trying to raise a family. There are other roles that have to be handled in other ways. This is where the bride/church comes in. Mother Church is a title we can take for granted but it is not one we can afford to forget. The role of the church as an entity is important. There has to be a warmth to a parish family. Too many people think that is simply the priest's job. No that is something that every member of the church must grow into or they will be growing away from the church and from the possibility of heaven itself.

Where does that warmth come from? A friendly greeting to those around you can make a huge difference. It can also be destroyed by being cold or aloft to those around you. Creating an atmosphere of understanding in the midst of the decisions that the Father/priest must make from day-to-day is also important. This can be destroyed by gossip and negativity. These two things happen when people don't try to see what the Father and Mother Church are trying to do as they help different kinds of family members. The one who lives in the past can be furious when things change. The one who lives in the hopes of new opportunities gets angry when we get stuck in the past. Children tend to be limited to their own perspective and get very crabby when they don't get their way. As we become adults we hopefully mature and realize that we are part of something bigger and we will not always get our way.

So what are some practical things that the parish family needs? As a Father I have great hopes each year for the parish picnic. Like any dad I am always ready to hear the complaints of: "It's too hot." "It's too cold." "There is nothing for me to do." "My friends won't be there." And yet as a Father I keep hoping more of the children will grow up and make new friends in the midst of some discomfort. I know that this year that the picnic is very critical to the budget.

I keep watching the contributions to the parish get smaller and smaller. The Finance Committee has tracked that trend back over seven years. Up to now, as Father, I have been able to make things work with less and less. This year even though the budget was lower, we still are over \$40,000 short. I really need more members of the family to help with the burden. I'm not trying to feed breakfast and dinner to a hungry family. I am trying to provide you with supper, the Bread of Life. So as we celebrate Father's Day I am asking for your help.

There has been information about the parish picnic in the bulletin for the last few weeks. You will be receiving more information on it from me soon. Next week I hope to have a summary of this past year's finances and next year's budget. With all the limitations of any dad/Father I am asking for your help with helping you all focus on your journey to heaven.

God bless you,  
Fr. Frank