

## 6.18.2017 Father's Day (1 John 4:7-21)

I wouldn't give up being a dad for anything, but being a good father isn't easy. It's a difficult and daily endeavor, and after the birth of your first child, it is a calling that lasts your entire life. Fortunately, our culture is filled with a multitude of role models that exemplify exactly what it means to be a great dad. This Father's Day, if you want your children to be those that are scouring the stores for that #1 Dad t-shirt (instead of another pair of socks!), look no further than such great examples of fatherhood as these: Archie Bunker, Al Bundy, Homer Simpson, and of course, my personal favorite, Darth Vader. Now, while I've never used a mind probe in an attempt to force my daughter reveal the secret location of her hidden rebel base or cut off my son's hand with a light saber, I've made my share of mistakes.

In my role as a dad, like every human father, I've left undone those things which I ought to have done, and I have done those things which I ought not to have done. The realization of that fact, and the struggle that I've encountered to whole-heartedly forgive my own dad for his mistakes, leads me to begin the sermon on this day that we celebrate our fathers by saying this: Forgive your father. In all he's done and all he's failed to do, remember we are all imperfect human beings. We've all made mistakes. We've all "*come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23), and we all want to be shown mercy and offered forgiveness for our failures, so we should be merciful and forgiving when others fail us (Matthew 6:12). Just like you, your father is the product of a fallen world and flawed parents. So often we place the blame for our father's mistakes completely on his broad shoulders forgetting that our dads were once kids as well, little children influenced by the wrong friends, imperfect parents, and the failures of society. So, whether your dad is sitting next to you today, is a thousand miles away, or has passed from this life to the next, may God give us all the grace to forgive, honor, and love our fathers with the sacrificial love that God our Father has lavished upon us.

When we consider the Epistle appointed for today, our thinking transitions from our finite human fathers, to thoughts of our Infinite and Almighty Heavenly Father. As we gather in His house this morning, let's turn our attention away from popular examples of fatherhood we see in this world,

and focus on some aspects of Divine fatherhood found in the passage of Holy Scripture we read this morning. St John writes: *“No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in Him, and he in God”* (1 John 4:12-15).

These verses quickly bring to mind what we discussed on the day we celebrated Pentecost, the unimaginable truth that Almighty God no longer dwells *among* His chosen people, but *in* His chosen people. Such words are unspeakable, but this is the glorious truth that God has revealed to us: The Holy Spirit of God, our Heavenly Father, dwells in us, and we in Him. Father’s Day is the perfect time to consider how God takes our idea of the natural role of a father and raises it to the supernatural. The great dads of this world walk alongside their children over the course of their lives empowering them in a way that only a dad can and helping them accomplish more than they could on their own, but compare that natural role of fatherhood to the example of God our Father, for by His Spirit our Heavenly Father dwells inside His children, and imparts us with His grace to do those things that we could never do on our own.

Consider as well the difference in one of the ways we get to know our father and recognize his presence in our lives. We look upon our dads with our eyes. We recognize our dad, acknowledge his presence, and learn things about him by seeing him there, but St. John tells us that *“no man hath seen God at any time.”* We can’t come to knowledge of our Heavenly Father by looking upon Him with our eyes. In this epistle, John tells us the only way that we may know we have any true knowledge of God is by our love for one another. Our love for one another is the evidence that God dwells in us. We may not be able to become acquainted with God our Father by sight, but we may by love, and the truth that He abides in us is demonstrated in our lives by a sacrificial love for one another.

Another aspect of Divine fatherhood that we recognize in this epistle is found

in these words: *“We love Him, because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). The sacrificial love we have for God and for one another did not find its beginning in us, but in God, for a child cannot give what has not been given to them. We see examples of this every day, children in our society that fail, not due to their own fault or for lack of effort, but because they were never given the tools that are necessary for success. We were destined for failure as well. In fact, due to the ravaging effects of Original Sin and the frailty of our own human nature, we were destined for death, but by the grace of God He loved us first, and while we were yet sinners sent His Son to die for us (Romans 5:8). He didn't wait for us to meet His standard, match His expectations, or make Him proud. It was quite the opposite. He loved us when we were lost sheep, left the ninety-nine to go after us, and rejoiced as He carried us home on His shoulders (Luke 15:3-7). He loved us first, chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and through the precious Blood of His Son, provided the only way to stand holy and blameless in His presence (Ephesians 1:4).

He loved us first, and I would suggest that nothing will ignite in us a greater, more freely given response to His perfect, unconditional love than to reflect on the sacrificial way that our Omnipotent Father chose to manifest His love for us. Consider the inspired words of St. John: *“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:9-10). Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, freely gave His life on the Cross to pay the price for our freedom. *“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”* (1 John 2:2).

This miraculous declaration of forgiveness and freedom is sadly often rejected because our society encourages each individual to find their own way to God. In our culture, Jesus' claim that *“I am the Way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6) is viewed as exclusive and even intolerant, but I would suggest that when we consider the depth of our fall, the real mystery is not that there is only one *Way* to God,

but that there is a *Way* to Him. It is a miracle that the Maker of Heaven and Earth, the God of the Universe, would make a way for you and I to spend eternity with Him. It is beyond comprehension that this way would cost Him the life of His only-begotten Son. Yet this is what God the Father has done for us.

If you are a father or not, consider what this means by placing yourself in a similar situation. Imagine that you could choose to save the life of another person, but at the cost of your child's life. Perhaps you have a daughter who is a doctor and will save patients during an epidemic, but you know that she will contract the disease and die a horrible, painful death; or your son is a soldier who will save a village from the horrors of ISIS, but you know that he will be captured and beheaded. If it were up to you, what would you do?

As a dad I can't think of a situation where I would send one of my children to die so that someone else could live, but if you did that for me, I know this: I would never again doubt your love for me. My friends, this is what God our Father has done for us. "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). God sent His Son. This is the Good News of the depth of our Father's love, and it is the glorious reason to celebrate this Father's Day.