

Happy Father's Day, and welcome to the house of your Holy Father! Alleluia! This morning we're going to talk about the power of a father's love and especially that of our Father God. Amidst the insanity of this world, our Father in heaven nurtures us in body and mind, spirit and soul day by day. We are blessed to be here to receive from him assurance of his love for us.

## OPENING PRAYER

### **ROMANS 6:12-23**

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. <sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. <sup>19</sup> I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. <sup>20</sup> When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. <sup>21</sup> What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There's a lot to think about these days, isn't there? The pandemic and our health, the election in less than 5-months, the protests and demonstrations, the killings, and the economy. These things weigh heavy on the heart. And we're not the only ones with troubles. I have a personal interest in what is happening in West Africa. Earlier this week, I read about 80 people who were slaughtered in a village in Northeast Nigeria by Islamists. Happened in about 10-minutes time. The people were alive. And then they were not.

Life is fragile, though in our country it might be easy to take it for granted because of our general affluence. But affluence is fickle and it is deceiving. Too easily we can pass from the joy of a holiday to weeks of quarantine or the ICU. One day we chow down at our favorite eatery, and the next day that same place has been shut down.

So all we want to do is go home, lock the door, and snuggle up under our down comforter and listen to Kenny G., or anything besides another news report which forces me to confront the rage and the sadness, the bloodshed and the tears of this world.

For in our homes we find our families, that place where we find comfort, encouragement, and peace despite the things on the other side of the door. It's Father's Day, and I'm thankful for the strong tradition in our church of equipping men to be good dads, to provide physical security and spiritual leadership for their families.

If you grew up in a strong home, you might not see this because it's like, "Duh, of course, everyone knows that everyone has a part to play, that mom and dad are both important in the scheme of things when it comes to having a happy and healthy family."

But whether you did or you didn't have a healthy home growing up, you might find these numbers interesting. A few years ago the Pew Foundation did a survey and discovered how people are influenced by their parents' spirituality. They found that,

- Only 10% of people became Christians if their parents did NOT go to church;
- 25% became Christians if their mothers took them to church;
- **75% became Christians if their fathers took them to church;**
- and 90% became Christians if both parents took them to church.

We could probably talk for hours about why only 25% of children whose mothers take them to church become church-going Christians and why 75% of children whose fathers take them to church become church-going Christians. And that might be an interesting conversation. But what I'm really interested in is that dads have a powerful role to play in their homes which goes way over and beyond

being the so-called breadwinner, a more important role than we usually give them credit for.

This is not to underplay the importance of moms. Not by any means. But it is to lift up the importance of the relationship of a father to his children.

The idea of fatherhood is so important, the Lord uses it to help us understand the church. Consider St. Paul. Throughout his letters he used the language of adoption and fatherhood when he talked about how the people were his children and he was their father spiritually. For example, to the church in Corinth, he wrote, **“For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. But I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:15)** (cf., 1Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4, 1Thes 2:11).

Throughout this letter and the others we read about Paul’s affection for his spiritual children, how he gave his life for them, how he fought Satan on their behalf, how he sacrifices himself physically and emotionally for them without any concern for his own wellbeing.

And consider Joshua. He was the protégé of Moses, and when he took over the leadership of the people of Israel, he made very clear his understanding of himself as the head of his own family. He wrote, **“If it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).**

For many years thereafter, Joshua led the people of Israel as though they were his own children, protecting them, guiding them with wisdom, loving them, and affirming in them their identity as children of God.

And consider Job. The book by his name opens up by describing his love for his children and how that love translated into his spiritual work on their behalf. We read that his sons and daughters had these great blowout parties which lasted for days, and that after they were done, **“(he) would send for and consecrate them, and he would... offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For (he) said, ‘It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts’” (Job 1:4-5).**

Job was dedicated to his children's spiritual welfare. He understood their weaknesses, their struggles, and he did the one most powerful thing he could do for them as their spiritual leader: He interceded for them before God his Father.

On the other hand, not all of us have been so fortunate as to have a good, God-fearing father. I'm reminded of the testimony of one of my members at St. Luke's a few years ago. Her name is Jyll. After several people stood and gave testimony about how their fathers were wonderful men of God, she said, "When I think of my dad, words that come to mind are abandonment, rejection, loneliness, unfairness, strictness, harshness, criticism, yelling, and excessive and ridiculous punishments.

"I grew up with a lot of anger, fear, insecurity, and loneliness, that all came from the controlling, unfair, critical, harsh feelings and behaviors that I had learned from my dad and adopted as my own.

"But," she said, "when I learned to trust in my true Father, the Lord God, when I put all my trust in him, I was released from all that. We don't all have great biological dads, but we all have a Wonderful and Mighty Father in Heaven who loves us unconditionally – no matter what – and he will never fail us – he will never abandon us – and his door is always open to comfort our hurts and provide for all our needs FOR he gave his very own precious and beloved Son for us. He gave the ultimate sacrifice for you and for me. God is my Father forever! Amen!"

Jyll is a miracle. It would've been better if her father had been a man of God and had led her to the Lord himself. Nonetheless, the Lord loved Jyll, and he reached down and he spoke to her heart, and he revealed himself to her as her true Father who will never let her slip from the palm of his hand.

St. Paul wrote, **"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:14-17).**

In Christ, we're no longer in bondage to the abandonment and rejection we experienced as children. We're no longer slaves to the behaviors we were raised to imitate. You have been forgiven. You have been renewed. And you have been

brought into a pure relationship with God your Father. You are an heir of God's Kingdom; you are a member of God's heavenly family. God hears your prayers, and he listens even now as we cry out to him, **"Abba! Father!"**

God our Father is our strength in this pandemic, wherever it takes us. God our Father is our hope amidst the social unrest. God our Father is our love despite the frustrations and heartache that fill this world. **"Abba! Father!"**

Now I don't want us to just go home and pat ourselves on the back for having a lovely family. But let's take this Word, this Gospel, the Good News of Father God's love to the people with whom we live and work and spend our days with.

In the Epistle this morning, Paul wrote three commands to guide us. Each one begins with the word "offer." He said,

- **"offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life...."**
- **"offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness...."**
- **"offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness" (Romans 6:13-19).**

Let's not act like dead people—that's what Paul meant with the first command, to **"offer yourselves... as those who have been brought from death to life."** Don't be grumpy and nasty like people who don't have any hope. We have hope, so let's act like it.

Let's pray that God would use us to do his will. That's what Paul meant when he wrote that we should **"offer (ourselves) to him as an instrument of righteousness."** We begin our days by asking the Lord to lead us in our work, and then we listen to his Spirit for instruction as we go about our day.

And let's pledge ourselves to obey God's Word as we receive it. That's what Paul meant when he wrote to **"offer (ourselves) as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness."** You hear the Word, and you either say yes or no or maybe. Let's say yes.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God your Father in heaven loves you, he holds you in the palm of his hand, and he will never let you go, in the name of Jesus. Amen.