

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

In response to some requests I'm printing the remarks I made last Sunday regarding Christian fatherhood. I hope that you find them helpful.

With my prayers,
Fr. Conley

Of all of the good news that we can discover in the Gospels one of the most important teachings is that because of what Jesus Christ has done, each one of us is now invited by Him to call God our Father. By His death and resurrection Jesus has restored the harmony that was broken by Adam's sin and through our Baptism into Christ we now share His status as sons and daughters of God. And because, as St. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, all fatherhood on earth takes its name from God our Father, this privilege of calling God our Father can also help us to understand the meaning of the human fatherhood which we are celebrating today.

According to Jesus, our Father in heaven is our provider and protector who knows our needs better than we do ourselves and He responds to them generously. Our Father in Heaven, like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, is also all merciful. God our Father loves us as we are. However, He also loves us too much to leave us in our sins so our Heavenly Father challenges us to live up to our dignity as His adopted children. God our Father expects a lot from us but then He has given us everything we need, including His only Son so that we can live up to His expectations. The model for human fatherhood that God gives us then is of a person who is a loving provider and protector of his children but who also challenges his children to live up to their true dignity.

Now based on the model of God's Fatherhood, I think there are six essential things Christian fathers need to remember in order to fulfill the promise of their wonderful vocation.

First, fathers need to remember that You are God's gift to your children. Because your children are your very flesh and blood, no one can be a father to your children as effectively as you can be. Your children are a gift to you from God and from your wives, and you are God's gift to them. Cherish the honor and dignity of your calling as a father.

Secondly, trust in the Lord. Be confident that God will give you all you need to be a good father to your children. Strive to be a good son of your heavenly Father by being obedient to His commandments and by using the sources of grace, that is, prayer, the sacraments and His word, which He has given to you. Do not be shy about sharing your faith with your children. Teach them to pray and to walk in the ways of the Lord. In our time and place you will especially need the strength the Lord wishes to give you in order to teach your children discipline and responsibility. Just as it often rejects the fatherhood of God, our popular culture has done much to undermine human fatherhood. We've gone from "Father Know's Best" in the 1950's to father is an idiot like Homer Simpson. In such an environment it can be hard to meet the responsibilities of fatherhood. However, you cannot refuse them. As the noted Catholic psychologist Dr. Ray Gaurendi remarked, if you don't teach discipline to your children the world will. However, unlike your fatherly discipline administered with love, the world will discipline your children through failing grades, poor job prospects, broken marriages and perhaps criminal charges. So fathers, teach your children discipline, otherwise the world will. I can think of no better example that you can give them about taking responsibility than to bring them as a family to the Sacrament of Confession. If they see that you take responsibility before God for your actions they will learn to do the same.

Thirdly, love your wife. Actively care for her and be attentive to her needs. Be sure to support her and tell her that you love her. This is a great gift not only for her, but for your whole family. Your sons will learn to treat

women with the respect they deserve and your daughters will learn that they deserve to be respected.

Unfortunately, there are too many women in our society who have learned to expect nothing from the men in their lives and that is what they are getting, nothing. Parents and grandparents need to teach their daughters not to get involved with men who are unwilling to their husbands or true fathers to their children. So many of the social problems we have as a nation—poverty, crime, drug abuse, etc.—are directly related to children being raised without fathers. It is tragic enough when children are being raised by single-moms because of divorce. But for a woman to accept having relations with a man when he is unwilling to accept her as his wife too often brings misery to her and her children. We can continue to throw billions of dollars at our social problems but as long as we are willing to accept fatherless “families” they won’t go away.

Fourth, remember that you are irreplaceable. No one needs you more than your children. Your active involvement in the raising of your children is essential. Wherever you work, one day you will be replaced. However, you are irreplaceable in your home and your presence or absence in your home will be remembered long after your professional life is over. Many fathers experience the tension of balancing family and professional life. Remember that your professional work is meant to support you in your primary vocation of being a husband and father.

Fifth, join in mutual support with other men and families who share the Christian vision of fatherhood and family life. We are trying to start a men’s group in the parish precisely for this purpose. The Knights of Columbus also do a lot to help men be good husbands and fathers.

Finally, ask St. Joseph, the patron of fathers, to pray for you in your vocation as a father. God the Father entrusted Jesus to the care of Joseph just as He has entrusted your children to your care. Ask St. Joseph to pray for you that you will always live up to this wonderful and challenging vocation.

In recent times many in our society have rejected the Fatherhood of God by refusing His invitation to live as His children. Concurrent with this rejection of God the Father has been a similar rejection of the importance of human fatherhood. I don’t need to tell you that our collective rejection of both divine and human fatherhood has had terrible social and spiritual consequences. On this day as we honor our fathers let us pray that the Fatherhood of God and the dignity of human fatherhood will once again receive the reverence they deserve.