

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



CALL ME FATHER...

When I was in the seminary at Saint Joseph's in Yonkers studying for the priesthood, we had in residence several older retired priests who were rather "colorful" characters, to say the least. One priest, Monsignor Robert Brown, was someone I could never forget. Monsignor Brown hated being called "Monsignor." Cardinal Spellman had made him a Monsignor in the 1960's but he never went by that title because he detested it. Whenever I would address him with the title, "Monsignor" he would shake his head and say, "Please call me Father. How would you like it if I called you "Mons-Junior??" I would always laugh at that remark.

I was thinking about that special title "Father," since today we celebrate "Father's Day." It is a day that we thank our fathers, living and deceased, for all that they have done for us. Now in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Jesus said, "Call no man on earth your Father, for you have one Father who is in Heaven." Obviously, Our Lord did not mean that we cannot call our earthly dads, "Father." Nor did he mean that his modern apostles, the priests of the Church, could not be given that title, for we are spiritual fathers.

Our dads and we priests really should reflect the unique fatherhood of God and share it. Earthly fathers are very important in a family. First of all, a father is really the head of a family. A good father takes care of his children and provides for them. But a father is much more than just a "breadwinner" who is there to pay the bills for food, clothing and housing for his wife and children. A good father should also be a spiritual leader as well. He should "be there" for his kids and sacrifice for them.

I think that we could say that before someone can truly be a good father, he must be a mature man. That "maturity" aspect is sometimes hard to come by in our American society where we have one of the longest "childhoods" in the world. A father takes responsibility and can put up with hardships and sacrifice for his wife and children.

Today, some "fathers" are just that in name only. Every so often, a young couple who is not married will come to the rectory and arrange for their child's baptism. I usually ask the father why he does not want to commit himself permanently to his girlfriend and to this newly born child. Many times there are blank stares because there is often a real fear of commitment today and added responsibility.

Real fathers should be willing to affirm their love in the Sacrament of Marriage and be faithful and true to their wives for the rest of their lives. Is that hard? Certainly, but real fathers are strong enough to take the risks involved. As a spiritual leader, a true father will be concerned about the religious upbringing of his children and not just leave that to his wife or just entirely neglect it all together. As the head of a family, dad should see that all his children get to Mass on Sunday without fail. Fathers should try to bear witness to the faith by what they say and do.

Yes, as a priest, I am thrilled to be called by the name, "Father." A priest is a father of the wider family that is known as "Church." On this special day, let us truly be thankful for all the men that we call "Father."

Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome