

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 17, 2007

I hope you will pardon me if I tell a couple of cute stories for Fathers' Day.

There was a priest named O'Reilly who ran into Mrs. Donovan whom he had married to Mr. Donovan years before. Fr. O'Reilly asked how they were doing and she said fine, except for a very sad part of their life. They couldn't have children. Fr. O'Reilly said he was on his way to Rome and would light a candle for them so God would bless them with children. Several years later, Fr. O'Reilly ran into Mrs. Donovan and asked how things were going and asked if they had any children yet. She said yes, God blessed them with ten children, including three sets of twins. Fr. O'Reilly said, "praise the Lord." And how is Mr. Donovan doing and where is he now. She said, "he just left for Rome to blow out that darned candle."

Someone wrote a story of why God created children (and in the process grandchildren). Whenever your children are not perfect, take comfort in the fact that even the omnipotent God was not 100% successful with his children. He made Adam and Eve, and one of the first things he said was "DON'T." "Don't what?" Adam asked. "Don't eat the forbidden fruit!" God said. "Forbidden fruit! We have forbidden fruit? Hey Eve, we have forbidden fruit." "No way!" "Yeah, for real." "Do NOT eat the fruit" God said. "Why?" "Because I am your father and I said so!" God replied, wondering why he hadn't stopped creation after making the elephants. A few minutes later, God saw his children having an apple break and he wasn't happy. "Didn't I tell you not to eat the fruit?" God asked. "Uh huh," Adam replied. "Then why did you?" said the Father. "I don't know" said Eve. "She started it!" said Adam. "Did not!" "Did too!" "DID NOT!" Having had it with the two of them, God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own. Thus the pattern was set and it has never changed. If you have persistently and lovingly tried to give children wisdom and they haven't taken it, don't be too hard on yourself. If God had trouble raising children, what makes you think it would be a piece of cake for you?

Things to reflect on:

- * Grandchildren are God's reward for not killing your own.
- * The main purpose of holding children's parties is to remind yourself that there are children more awful than your own.
- * Advice for the day: Be nice to your kids. They will choose your nursing home one day.
- * And finally if you have a lot of tension and you get a headache, do what it says on the aspirin bottle. "Take two aspirin" and "keep away from children."

I hope that was not too irreverent. Seriously, children are a wonderful gift and they are our future. But sometimes they can be a challenge, so I admire all parents these days who are

doing the best they can with their children. I especially wish all of our fathers a very blessed and happy father's day.

I've said some of this before and if you've already heard it, please forgive me. I had a wonderful father. He was religious, he was intelligent, he was generous, he inspired his five children to work hard to use their gifts as best they could. He worked hard to provide for all of us, yet he had his faults. He did not readily forgive people who offended him, he was a dictator at home (affectionately nicknamed by my friends "the czar") and he was an alcoholic who at times did not hesitate to use his physical strength to keep law and order in the home. And he was strong. It's been 27 years since he died. For a long time I held a lot of resentment toward him, until one day the Lord relieved me of all my bad feelings. Our Lord helped me see the kind of dysfunctional, alcoholic home my dad came from and I realized he achieved a lot with what he had to work with. When my resentment was gone, I could respect him and appreciate him for who he was and for what he had been able to make of himself. Sometimes we forget parents are human and they are the product of the environment they grew up in. Our Lord also did another favor for me. He taught me that instead of being angry about the past and blaming my parents for their faults, I should put my energy toward working on some of my own problems. Having grown up in an alcoholic home, I realized I had much to learn about forgiveness and learn how to deal with conflict in constructive ways. If we let Our Lord guide us, he will. I have a lot of positive feelings for my dad for, in spite of his faults, he was generally a very good father. I am grateful for all the good things he did for me.

A lady (not from around here) came to me recently with some marriage problems. One of her problems was that her husband had grown up in an alcoholic home. It had affected him significantly, but he was in denial (as many times alcoholics and their families are). There are serious problems in today's society where many fathers have abandoned their position of leadership in the family or they walk away from their responsibilities and aren't there at all. I read recently that the average father spends 37 seconds per day with his children according to a Cornell University study. Husbands and fathers should not think they have to act like the czar, but they have responsibilities they share with their wives to love God, and each other and to teach their children how to live good lives.

As we think of fathers, we can't forget the One who created all of us. Of course the God we call Father has no gender for God does not have a physical body. Only Jesus does. However, the image of God as Father is a convenient and comfortable way of thinking of God for it was the way Jesus most often referred to God when he called him "abba", an Aramaic word meaning "daddy." The late Johnny Hart, who drew the cartoon BC, occasionally indulged in poetry. He wrote a poem for fathers' day that you might enjoy:

Everybody don't all have a father.

Some, there are, whose dads have passed along.

Then there's some who couldn't give less bother,

to family situations woebegone.

With dads you cannot just reach and 'nab' one,

but if for some reason you don't have one,

there's one on duty, all the time ---up there!

Through our Mass today we seek to give love to our heavenly Father who loves us infinitely. We ask his help for whatever we need. As always at Mass, we join with Jesus, the perfect human being and Son of God to offer our praise, our thanks, our whole selves to the One who has given us all that we have and hope to have.

Birth of John the Baptist

June 24, 2007

INTRODUCTION: We are mostly familiar with John the Baptist from the readings during Advent, as John was the prophet who immediately preceded Jesus and foretold his coming. His birthday is June 24, which usually falls on a weekday. It is considered an important feast, so important in fact that when it falls on Sunday, it takes precedence over the Sunday readings. For those who like to follow the readings in the red Worship book, they are 1038 (eve) or 1039 (day). If you are curious why the feast of his birth is today, consider this. When the archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary, the archangel told her that her cousin Elizabeth was already in her sixth month. The church figured that John's birth had to have been six months before the birth of Jesus. So, Christmas is six months away.

The liturgy usually puts the feast days of saints on the day they died and entered into eternal life. Only three birthdays are celebrated: John the Baptist, Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus himself. This is because their birth is considered especially holy since they were born free from any sin.

[at 4:00]

Our first reading is from Jeremiah, a prophet who lived 600 years before Christ. The reading describes the role of a prophet as was John the Baptist. It is a fitting description of John.

The gospel is the annunciation to John's father, the old priest Zechariah, that he and his elderly wife would have a child, a special child who would prepare God's people for the coming of the Messiah.

[at 8:00 and 10:00]

In today's first reading, the prophet Second Isaiah, who lived about 500 years before Christ, speaks of some mysterious person who was identified simply as God's servant. This poem and three others in Isaiah's writings are known as Servant Songs. The early Church found these songs described Jesus in a most uncanny way. They are usually read during Holy Week. Today, however, the liturgy applies this second of the Servant Songs to John the Baptist because it states: "the Lord called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name."

When the archangel Gabriel had appeared to John's father Zachariah nine months earlier, he told him his wife Elizabeth would have a son and he was to be named John. Zachariah and Elizabeth were an older couple and Zachariah didn't believe the angel. Not smart! He lost the ability to speak because of his lack of faith. (It's like the angel would not allow him to speak out his doubts but to keep his lack of faith to himself.) We hear in the gospel how Zachariah's ability to speak returned once John was born.

HOMILY: Since I gave a long introduction, I do not have a very long sermon. Or as Henry VIII said to his third wife, "I will not keep you long." One of Aesop's most famous fables is the story of the ant and the grasshopper.

The story goes like this:

In a field one summer's day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. An Ant passed by, bearing along with great toil a kernel of corn he was taking to the nest. "Why not come and chat with me," said the Grasshopper, "instead of toiling and mooling in that way?" "I am helping to lay up food for the winter," said the Ant, "and recommend you to do the same." "Why bother about winter?" said the Grasshopper; we have got plenty of food at present." But the Ant went on its way and continued its toil. When the winter came the Grasshopper had no food and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer. Then the Grasshopper knew: "It is best to prepare for the days of necessity."

Solid, practical, down to earth wisdom from 2500 years ago! It's still true. If we do not learn this lesson when life is good, we'll regretfully learn it when it's too late. This goes for education, investing, health and all kinds of important areas of life. John the Baptist's role in life was to insist on the need to prepare. He called people to repent and prepare for the coming of God's kingdom. His message is as important today as it ever was. There is a kind of new age theology that follows the attitude of the Grasshopper. It says don't worry. We're all going to heaven. We'll all be happy in the end. God wants all people to be saved, as St. Paul tells us, but there are abundant passages in every part of the Scriptures that warn us that salvation is not a given. There are things that are necessary for salvation and things that will prevent our salvation. The gentle, loving Jesus, who revealed to us so clearly the love of God, warned us: "The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in, because many will try to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13,23) Jesus, too, like John the Baptist called us to repentance and conversion of heart. I

think the most important lesson we can learn from this feast of John the Baptist is to prepare. The fact you are here today is one good sign that you understand the need to prepare. If you want some more specific ideas, the insert in today's bulletin about love of God might give you a few good ideas on how to prepare better. Amen.