

MARFAM: REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS ON FATHERHOOD

FATHERHOOD of GOD and MAN - A TIME OF REFLECTION AND PRAYER

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that we might not die
but have eternal life." John 3:16

A father-wound. Our present-day society can be said to be suffering from a father-wound. We are suffering. Our children are suffering. Fathers play an important role in family life and in society. Children need male and female role models. Children need to see and experience a loving, committed relationship in their parents. That is not always the case.

Sometimes fathers are absent.

Sometimes fathers are not committed, even abusive.

Sometimes fathers are alienated, lost and don't feel needed.

Our image of God and of fatherhood are related. If our image of a father is hard, God could be seen as hard. Not only children, but every human being has a longing for a father, one on whom we can depend, one whom we can trust, who will affirm us and build us up.

As parents and as children of our own parents, maybe our memories are happy, or maybe they are painful. We may need to heal our memories, forgive our fathers, become true fathers to our own children and future children, or support and encourage fathers to be there for their children.

God, our father, is our model of fatherhood, a loving, forgiving father who shows all human fathers the way. One who loved all his children so passionately that he gave His own Son so that we, His children could have eternal life. The idea of God as Father is not a common Old Testament one but one brought to us by Jesus who called God, Abba - loving father and shares his Father with us in giving us the prayer OUR FATHER.

REFLECT on your own experience of fatherhood, your own father, yourself as father, the fathers in your family. Is it positive or negative? Can or should something be done to make things better? Bring your positive and negative thoughts to God, the Father and ask him for what you need.

SING. Abba, Abba, Father. You are the potter, we are the clay, the work of your hands.
Father, may we be one in you, as he is in you and you are in him, and you are in him.
Glory, glory and praise to you, glory and praise to you, for ever, amen. For ever, amen.

PRAY THE PSALM (Adapted from PSALM 144)

Our Father is kind and full of compassion,
Slow to anger, abounding in love.
How good is Our Father to all,
Compassionate to all his creatures.

Our Father is faithful in all his words
And loving in all his deeds.
Our Father supports all who fall
And raises all who are bowed down.

Our Father is just in all his ways
And loving in all his deeds.
He is close to all who call him,
Who call on him from their hearts.



PRAY: May the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with the fathers in our family, may he inspire and strengthen all fathers and bless them with love, peace and joy. Amen.

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FATHERHOOD - a reflection on 1 Cor 13.

If I speak in the slang of my teens and understand the language of their peers, but do not give them love, I am just like so much noise falling on their ears.

If I could tell my children exactly what their future holds; if I knew everything ahead of them, and if I believe that someday each one of them will be successful, but do not give them love, I am nothing.

If I give them everything they want; if I sacrifice all I have - even my life - for them, but do not love them, they gain nothing.

A father's love is patient even with straying offspring. It is kind to the daughter who is hurting, even if it is her own fault. It never says: "I told you so!" Fatherly love is not rude, even to the rebellious son, nor easily angered by his ways.

A father's love does not delight in dire predictions which come to pass, but rejoices at the slightest sign of reform in the teen who drifts away.

Fatherly love protects the toddler; firmly guides the adolescent; hopes for those who falter year after year.

A father's love never gives up.

Our plans for the future may fail. Our advice may be refused. Our knowledge may fall short, for we do not know everything and we cannot control our children. But we can always love.

When I was a young father, I was a visionary. I had all the formulas for successful child-rearing. But when my children grew up, I had to put those immature ideas behind me.

Now I have no answers; I know so little and my understanding is limited. Only in heaven will I know the rest. There my understanding will be complete. My joy will be total and my tears will be wiped away.

Three things I have now:

FAITH that my children will remember their training;

HOPE that this will influence their lives for the better,

and **LOVE** that continues no matter what. And the greatest of these three is LOVE!

(With acknowledgements to St Paul!)

St Paul 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

"If I have all the eloquence of men or angels but speak without love I am simply a gong booming or cymbal clashing.

If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are and knowing everything and if I have faith in all its fullness to move mountains but without love then I am nothing at all.

If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece and if I even let them take my body to burn, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.

Love is always patient and kind, it is never jealous;

love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence and is not resentful.

Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.

Love does not come to an end."

When all else fails "three things remain, faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love."

(with acknowledgements to St Paul!)

May all you fathers be proud of your youth.

May all you youth be proud of your fathers.

May you cherish and forgive each other

And may the peace of Christ reign in your homes and families

As we celebrate Youth Day and Father's Day this weekend

SOME THOUGHTS ON FATHERHOOD TODAY

Society is said to be suffering from a father wound. But what does that mean and is that experience universal? Fatherhood is perceived very differently in different cultures and even in different age groups.

In an African culture any older person was addressed as "ntate" and given the respect due to a father.

In the typical extended family the father-child relationship is more distant and not as intimate as in the smaller nuclear family. The African concept of family is still of the extended family but due to economic circumstances, migrant labour and urbanisation the African family has become fragmented and now has a number of different forms. Smaller husband-wife-children families are more common, but also common is the unit of grandmothers, mothers and children. Another is grandparents or grandmother and children.

Father is often living elsewhere, sometimes with a woman other than his wife. Women may not even choose to have a husband or want to live with the father of their children. Right across cultural lines there are now many woman-child family units with men living semi-bachelor lives. This may be due to divorce or as is often the case an unmarried teenage mother. Divorced fathers do have children spending time with them, usually weekend and holiday time but this is unfortunately a rather unnatural setting. The nuclear family with father, mother and children which many of us consider the norm is in fact not the way that the majority of children experience family life.

Some factors that impact on fatherhood are :

Poverty - the poor often have larger families with the father struggling to support them and working very long hours, or he may be absent or even unknown.

Employment. Fathers are more likely than mothers to look for work away from their families. With a high unemployment rate it is not uncommon for the mother to be employed and father to be out of work or earning less than his wife. Some fathers have adapted to working from home and many take a greater role in child-care than ever before.

Women's empowerment. - Because of the masochistic behaviour of a good number of men, and the lack of equality in marriage, women are choosing not to marry and subject themselves to an abusive husband, or an irresponsible breadwinner. Consequently these men are remaining or becoming more irresponsible.

Stress and social pressure - There is tremendous pressure on men to achieve, even to hold their own, in the job market and among the more affluent these pressures often lead to a break-down in the marriage.

A social malaise - Because of employment and other difficulties in establishing a career, young adults may become demotivated and just live for a good time and may not be willing to be responsible or accountable for their actions.

What has this done to the role of fathers, their own perception and the perception of women and children?

Does a family need a live-in father? Many women would say, "no thanks" and the children learn from that.

Many young people, boys and girls say they do not intend to marry.

What implications does that have for the future of society? Psychologists and sociologists claim that for a healthy well-balanced personality development a child needs to have male and female role models. Without stereotyping the roles children need mothers to model nurturing, fathers to model strength and reliability. Self-discipline is learned in the family and children need to experience the give-and-take of the normal, natural interaction of their parents.

Men and women for their personal ongoing development need to experience the love and security of a committed relationship and to be able to play out their natural roles.

Fathers are not an optional extra. Society is suffering the consequences of a father wound.

Does anyone know of a society for the protection and strengthening of fatherhood?

Today, with increasing awareness of fatherhood matter a number of programmes are offered e.g. Heartlines, Sonke Gender Justice. The Catholic church conscious of the many women's sodalities is also promoting Men's groups or Forums. These do include a focus on fatherhood in addition to men's issues in general.

A Prayer Reflection on fatherhood and God the Father.

Dear Father God,
Why do we call you Father?
Why do we call anyone father?
What does it mean to be father?
Does the physical act of fathering change man to father
bone of his bone, flesh of is flesh,
or is there more.....
a bond created, an intimacy born,
a creature that is to be eternally his child
conceived, hoping to be born,
needy, dependent.

What can fathers learn from You as Father, of a most dearly-beloved Son?
What kind of father will offer such a son
for whatever cause?
Losing a child is hell.

Thank you for suffering that hell
so that Your creatures might have life.
Thank you, God.
Thank You, Father.

Toni Rowland. MARFAM

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS FOR FATHERS' DAY

- For all fathers, grandfathers, step-fathers, and fatherlike figures in our lives, may God bless them abundantly, we pray to the Lord,
- For all the fathers who have passed, may we hold them in our memory and in our hearts and honor them today, we pray to the Lord,
- For all those longing to become fathers, may You guide them through this hard time, we pray to the Lord,
- St. Joseph, may you intercede in the lives of all fathers struggling, and may you pray for them to draw near to God the Father, we pray to the Lord,

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