Homily for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026 Year A

This weekend we celebrate Father's Day, so let us think a little bit about fathers and what fatherhood is all about. Everybody born into this world has or has had a father, and some go on to be fathers themselves.

Dads, on the whole, are pretty much taken for granted, so it's important that we value and celebrate them.

Father's Day is a time when we should get in touch with the gratitude we should feel towards our fathers and become more aware of the enormous role dads play in a healthy family and a stable society.

For some of us that is very easy, but for some it is not. How do you feel gratitude for someone who is absent for whatever reason, or worse still, abusive?

And sad to say our world has many absent or abusive fathers and this can lead to an enormous gap in a child's life.

Without a father many are destined to go through life struggling, however unconsciously, without a role model to show them a healthy balance between freedom and discipline in their lives. Instead, they can be forever vacillating between being too harsh or too easy on themselves. An abusive or absent father or father figure can mean that child going through life, again perhaps unconsciously, always seeking something that has been withheld from them, in other words, their father's approval. They are left inhibited, and often angry, hungering for a father. This father hunger, to be affirmed or blessed by one's own father, is one of the deepest hungers in the world, especially amongst men. Not enough people have been blessed and affirmed by their own fathers, or a good father figure in their lives.

So, what is the father?

Anthropologists tell us that the archetypal father is meant to have the following qualities in his life…… he is meant to give order, to carry, to feed, and to bless his family.

What does this entail?

Order. A father is meant to be a principle of order in the lives of his children. A good father lives in such a way that his family feels safe and secure when he is around. He is a rock. A good father, even if his family considers him boring, will make his family feel safe and secure. A bad father, however, through absence, abuse, or even infidelity, creates an

atmosphere of unpredictability. His children will be forever guessing whether he will come home, and what mood he will be in even if he does come home. Too much of that and his children will then see him as a principle of disorder and chaos in their lives and react accordingly.

Carry. A good father carries his family rather than asking them to carry him. A good father is an adult, an elder, not a fellow sibling forever demanding that the family carry him. Of course, husbands and wives will support one another, but a good father does not make his own problems, tiredness or heartache, the centre of the family's attention. The burdens and worries that some fathers carry in these times of unemployment and financial insecurity are truly heroic. Ask your father how he does it, and he will probably answer, 'that's what a dad does'. He is strong and his instinct is to make sacrifices.

Feeds. A good father feeds his family rather than feeds off of them. A good father does not demand, subtly or unconsciously. Because of this his children bring meaning, satisfaction and glory into his own life. Rather he is more concerned that his children and his family find meaning, satisfaction and happiness in their own lives. Good parents feed their children, bad parents feed off them. He is a teacher as well as a guide.

Affirms. Finally, a good father affirms and admires his children, rather than demanding that they affirm and admire him. A good father expresses to his children his pride in them, as opposed to being threatened by their talents and achievements. He doesn't demand that his children express their pride in him.

A number of years ago the death occurred in America of a great Jesuit priest called Daniel Berrigan.

Daniel first came to prominence in the 60s with anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, for which he was sent to prison. In his autobiography he explains how he had to struggle with various issues in his life, especially authority, simply because of the absence of blessings from his own father. He gave, as an example, how he was always afraid to share with his father the good news of a new book that he had just published because he feared his father's jealousy. Because of this he asks, is it any wonder that he was leery and suspicious of any authority figure during his entire adult life? The absence of a father's blessing can leave us with a constriction of the heart.

There is also a good example in the world of nature. A newborn calf comes out of the womb severely constricted, rigid and bound up in a glue-like afterbirth. But nature has given the mother the proper instinct. She turns around and instantly licks the constriction

off her calf. As soon as she's finished the calf stands up, tests its legs and begins to walk on its own. As humans we are born into the same condition. We come into life constricted, not so much physically, but in a much deeper and more complex way. It is the task of our parents to remove that constriction by ordering, carrying, feeding and blessing us. No father does this perfectly, but if your father did it even half adequately, today's the day to express your gratitude and count your blessings.

So vital is the rule as a father, that we even attribute the description to God himself. When next praying ‘The Our Father’ see how we thank and praise him for bringing order, and carrying, feeding, and blessing into our lives.

God bless fathers everywhere for who they are and what they do.