

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 16/17, 2018 – Father’s Day – Reflection

I’ve never had a woman, the love of my life, tell me, “Sit down - I’ve got something to tell you ... you’re gonna be a Dad!”

I’ve held many newborn babies in my arms, but never one where I said, “Welcome to the world, little one ... I’m your Daddy!”

I’ve been to hundreds of graduations, but never to see my kid walk across the stage.

I’ve danced at hundreds of weddings, but never in the arms of Daddy’s little girl.

And yet, over the years, thousands of people have called me “Father”: school kids and teens; faithfilled people and infrequent fliers; sports teammates and civic leaders; elders and folk in need. Over the years, people have shared with me their deepest secrets, come to me with their breaking hearts, invited me to be part of their most joyful moments, welcomed me like family into their homes ... and all of them have called me “Father”. What an honor and a joy it’s been to be a father to so so many!

But something’s been much on my mind, unsettling my heart and I feel that I need to confess to some of my children that I did something that I’m not proud of, something that was not very father-like.

Almost two weeks ago, I was at my desk working on a talk or preparing for a class ... I forget exactly, and it doesn’t matter. The phone rang. I

answered and heard the voice of a man on the other end of the line. I'm pretty sure he didn't give me his name but he made the question he had for me very clear. He wondered if he and his fiancé could be married in Assumption Church or "the other one on Main Street". He had a date selected which was less than two months away. I asked where they lived and he told me "here ... in Millbury". I confess that I judged that he and she probably hadn't darkened the door of the church - either church here - for a long, long time. I told him that people coming for marriage usually begin the preparations at least a year in advance, six months at the very least. I said to him that the time was too short and we couldn't possibly get everything done in that amount of time. We talked a little more about some possibilities and ended our conversation pleasantly, with well-wishes and gratitude.

After I hung up the phone, I felt like a real creep. A real father would do almost anything for his kid, even lay down his life for his kid. I hid behind rules and said something was impossible when it really wasn't.

What would God, our Father, do? Even though the son be prodigal and pig-headed, the Father would search for him, and when He finds him, would embrace him, put a coat on his shoulders and a ring on his finger, have a feast in his honor, and welcome him home. I told my son on the phone he needed to find another home.

What would Jesus, the Son of the Father do? Even though the thief hanging on the cross deserved his punishment, he made a deathbed confession, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Jesus forgot all the past, waived the waiting period, tossed the rules out and said like a father would, "This day you shall be with me in

Paradise!" I told my son hanging on the phone about time limits and procedures.

The only reason that I'm a father on earth is that people should see in me a little of my Father in heaven. The only reason any of us could be called father or mother is that we bring our children to God the Father who has placed these children of His in our care for a few years on this earth.

It's only natural that we like it when people notice us, thank us, honor us, give us their love and respect. It's only human for a father ... or a mother ... to hope that their kids remember the sacrifices, the life-lessons, the support, the patience ... and, on a day like today, to say so in a card or a little gift or a meal or a time together.

But, Jesus once warned, "Call no man on earth your father. You have only one father, your Father in heaven!"

Any Dad or Mom, any priest or preacher looking for love and respect should look in the mirror and see whether or not how you are, how you act, how you give mercy looks like how a real Father would, how God would ... how Our Father, who art in heaven, gives us our daily bread and forgives us our trespasses and leads us home ... how Our Father would look.