

BULLETIN – JUNE 19

Happy Father's Day! And don't feel guilty about it! Ever since Gloria Steinem (1934-) declared several decades ago that "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle," the culture and the media around us have blithely cooperated in tearing down the institution of male identity and fatherhood. *Patriarchy, male, husband, and father* are all concepts about which, we are told, we should be very, very suspicious because they have been responsible for so much evil. War, violence, abuse are all generally assumed to be male vices which only occasionally and uncharacteristically creep across gender lines as a kind of minor addendum to the reality show of life on earth. Even some in the Church have cooperated with this anti-male campaign, replacing the divine personal names *Father* and *Son* used by Our Lord himself with the non-gender functional descriptors *Creator* and *Redeemer*. These are perfectly good and doctrinally sound words, of course – EXCEPT when they are agenda-driven and the original words become virtually forbidden in "contemporary" (but not authorized) liturgical prayer.

What do we make, then, of the recent report that tells us that 85% of the young men in the nation's prison systems come from fatherless homes? It seems that lacking the presence of the adult male husband and father might just make a difference in the lives of children. Further, from the Catholic point of view, it has been found that if a non-Catholic mother enters the Catholic Church, there is a 17% chance that her children will also enter the Catholic Church. But if a non-Catholic *father* enters the Church, that percentage soars to **93%**! Statistics might sometimes lie; but when the percentages are so high and low as these, they truly ought to give us pause to wonder about the source of the anti-father bias that seems to be so predominant today.

So, dads: speak and act with the calm assurance and gentleness that disprove the image of a nervous Jervis, cowering in fear in the face of the feminist cultural onslaught. If it's true that so many people find the word "father" painful because of their own poor relationships with their fathers, make sure that YOU are giving each of your children the love and attention that will help them grow. Don't be discouraged by those sons and daughters who make their own bad choices and reject what you have been and done for them. Take heart in continuing to try to do your best every day to at least PRAY fervently for your children, if that's all that's within your power to do. If your fatherhood has been a train wreck up to now, don't leave it smoldering amidst a heap of crushed cars and torn-up rails. Get the engine back on track and start clearing the road. You've got a lot of freight still to salvage and a lot of passengers still to deliver. All aboard!!

What, Me Holy? We have been giving some thought to vocational issues, both to our vocation to be disciples of Jesus Christ and to our individual vocations *within* that common call, be they to the consecrated life, marriage, ordination, the lay state, celibacy, religious profession, or some combination of those. The Second Vatican Council issued a challenge to all Christians to which no one could, it would seem, take any reasonable objection: no matter what our individual vocations may be, we are *all* called to *holiness*. Many people have an overly pietistic notion of what that means. Many imagine holy people to be so other-worldly that they are no earthly good, and certainly no fun to be around. The perennial party poopers, the



wallflowers, the holier-than-thou types, the blue-noses, those who are plaster-statue indifferent to human joy and laughter, all these are likely popular images of what it means to be “holy.” We don’t often think of holiness as *integrity*, although we might allow that persons of integrity have a better crack at genuine holiness than persons without it.

Integrity means “wholeness,” and wholeness means being complete. Something that is complete is not missing anything. It is genuine, it is authentic. Perhaps now we’re getting a better idea of what holiness consists. The firm handshake of someone who isn’t afraid to look you in the eye. Being able to count on someone’s word. Knowing that someone is the “real deal,” that what you hear from them is neither idle gossip nor sprung from a desire to look good at others’ expense.

There are people who are functionally unable to fulfill these expectations. You might know of people who fit those descriptions in the past, but now, for reasons beyond their control (dementia or other forms of physical or mental illness) are no longer able to carry on as we remembered them at their very best. Theirs is a different cross to bear at a different time in their lives, and they might well not even realize it. That’s when the charity of *other* members of the Christian family has to kick in and support those who generously supported us when they were capable.

The call to holiness does not exempt any part of our lives. Most of us, for instance, spend at least a portion of our lives getting one or another aspect of our appetites for food and drink under control, likely meeting with occasional failure. Food and drink are such basic needs, but too much of even the best things will throw our bodies and other parts of our lives out of balance. Some are born with allergies or proclivities that will make certain substances harmful to their bodies and souls. Lactose or glucose intolerance, celiac disease, alcoholism, and various food allergies are perhaps the most obvious conditions that are not sinful in themselves; but which mean that, to be a person of integrity, one who labors with that physical difficulty must forswear any consumption of the triggering item. We are all finite, and that means we all have our limitations. Humility, the foundation of all virtues, helps us to recognize that and to joyfully accept it as we go about growing in the other virtues.

Is there *any* aspect of our lives that lies beyond the call to discipleship, that is *not* subject to the demands of the gospel of Christ? No, not if we pledge to belong to Christ whole and entire, not if we strive to grow in intimate friendship with him. We often hear complaints from some of the Christian “faithful” in moments of moral rebellion, “The Church needs to stay out of my bedroom!” Why ever would that be? Are you saying that your sexuality is unique in being a gift of God that is *not* to be employed in a virtuous way, according to the demands of the gospel? That you, and you alone, are the one to determine what is right or wrong in that area of your life, regardless of the witness of the laws and teachings of God’s people for thousands of years? Isn’t that just a little arrogant? Is that the same latitude you would extend to greedy rich people, especially if you consider yourself neither greedy nor rich?

And just for the sake of argument, which other rooms of your house / life would you consider off limits to the demands of Christ and his Church’s teaching? The kitchen? The dining room? The basement den? The attic? The living room? The yard? The garage? Your library/DVD collection? Your investment portfolio? Your Facebook page? Your e-mails? Your phone records? See where this is leading? It’s kind of what

happens when someone hears something challenging from the pulpit, only to spout off, “The Church needs to keep politics out of the pulpit!!” That’s true, insofar as the preacher should not be telling you for whom to vote nor how to vote, unless the issue on the ballot is clearly one that fosters or encourages moral wrong (e.g., abortion, assisted suicide or euthanasia, other issues attacking the very nature of marriage, parenting, and family life). It would not be correct, for instance, for a preacher simply to weigh in with one doctrinaire opinion on a matter like gun control or capital punishment; but the preacher could legitimately ask questions of all parties concerning the *motives* behind their affirmative or negative votes. Christ, for instance, who was himself the victim of a most unjust sentence of capital punishment, did not settle the issue in John 8 with the woman caught in adultery. He did not fault the Torah, which commanded the stoning of one so apprehended. Rather, he left it to the audience to decide who should carry the sentence out. No one stepped forward, perhaps because each one knew himself to be a potential and justifiable target of others’ accusations.

True holiness is ever watchful of the motives for our own behaviors in every area, knowing that we are quite capable of doing even very good things for the wrong reasons. True holiness is also free of self-concern and self-concentration. The more I fuss and stew about becoming holy, the more likely I am to be off course, because a part of holiness consists in concentrating on God and others, not on oneself. Having that careful balance between healthy self-awareness and a preening egoism is important. It’s like taking your pulse and blood pressure to be sure you’re in shape to run the race. If you’re so consumed by your condition that you neglect to run, you’ll never finish the course. That’s why the examination of conscience is a helpful tool for our spiritual lives each evening and in preparation for confession. But the scrupulous person who indulges *only* in a constant and fretful state of self-examination is only spinning the wheels and sinking into a mire of self-concern. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme”
(attributed to Mark Twain, 1835-1910).