

Happy Father's Day! In today's readings we see the ups and downs of the lives of a prophets, sent by God to be His messengers. On this special day, let's compare prophets and fathers, their journeys, and their relationship with God.

The first similarity between prophets and fathers is they are both called to a NOBLE endeavor. Prophets are chosen to represent God in the world, and fathers are chosen to represent God in their families. The Catechism says, "The divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood." This means that human fatherhood reflects something REAL about God Himself. A father is called to be a living image of God's care, authority, protection, and love. This endeavor is truly noble and asks for a lifetime of dedication.

Today we jump into Chapter 20 of the book of Jeremiah, but first, let's open up Chapter 1 when Jeremiah was a young man of 17 to 20 years and hears the words God used to call him. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." God has great faith in Jeremiah, but Jeremiah is like an anxious dad driving home from the hospital for the first time with an infant in the back seat, thinking, "I don't know if I'm ready for this!" Jeremiah tells God, "I am too young!" But the LORD answers, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak." God vows to Jeremiah, and to all the dads in the world, that He will accompany them every minute of their vocation.

Whether we have biological children, stepchildren, adopted children, or play a major role in any young person's life, fatherly figures, like prophets, are not only called to share the good news, but also share their personal faith journey in their words and in their deeds. With the noble endeavor of the fatherly call comes the constant attention of young minds and hearts watching and modeling our every move, making it especially challenging.

The second similarity between prophets and fathers is, they accept their calling in spite of all the unknowns that come along with it. Sometimes a prophet's message is well received, but as we hear in today's reading, "Terror on every side," God's people often stray from His ways, and the prophet has the difficult job of delivering truth. Fathers also have to deliver the truth in the process of raising their children. Part of living the image of God's care, authority, protection, and love is conveying the reality of the many hidden evils in today's world. It's the challenge of getting kids away from screens and out into the beauty of God's creation. It's about promoting modesty and modeling charity. It's also about recognizing the reality of peer pressure and drawing young hearts into a lasting relationship with God and his abundant love. In today's gospel Jesus reminds the Apostles of God's love saying, "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." So, when we see the unknowns of fatherhood hit us, know we are not alone, like Jeremiah and the apostles, God confers to us the grace to persevere in our vocation.

The final similarity between prophets and fathers is how both callings inevitably lead to a profound prayer life. The prophets are constantly conversing with God as we see in Jeremiah's words, "Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord." This is the kind of dialog fathers are called into daily.

Jesus himself is constantly in prayer with the Father. St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr, comments on Luke 6 where it says, "Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God." St. Cyprian says, "Was the sinless Lord praying for himself? No, he was praying and interceding on OUR behalf." As fathers we are called into a dialog with God to intercede on behalf of our children, especially as they leave the nest and find their own way in the world.

In accepting the call to be a prophet or a father, we take on a deep responsibility for another's spiritual life but, it is a life we have LIMITED influence over. This can lead to a feeling of frustration and even a sense of failure. Yet, in today's reading, Jeremiah says, "But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph." After all he has been through, Jeremiah holds on to his reliance on the Lord. So, how do we make God our mighty champion as we live out his calling?

A decade ago, our kids put toothpicks into an avocado seed and put it in water to see if it would sprout. After a few weeks, when nothing happened, they planted the seed in the backyard. A few years went by, but then, a small avocado tree emerged from the ground. Each year it grew a few inches and eventually, it was 5 feet tall. However, the scrawny little tree had no fruit and seemed to have no potential. Then, during a Santa Ana windstorm, I noticed the tree whipping back and forth and I was afraid it was going to snap. So, I found a wooden tree stake, drove it deep into the ground, and attached it to the tree. Over the next two years, the tree exceeded all expectations. It grew to over ten feet tall and the trunk expanded well beyond the thickness of the stake. This spring it began to bear fruit and now has more than thirty, golf ball-sized, shiny avocados.

God works in our lives like a tree stake, keeping us grounded, giving us the support to weather the storms and helping us grow in confidence to accept His calling. He inspires us to be like Jeremiah, to persevere when we encounter opposition, and to carry our burdens during difficult times. He's offering his Holy Spirit to embolden our hearts as we live out our vocations as parents, mentors, priests and lay people, to shepherd and inspire the children in our lives and help them thrive like small avocados, with God's love.

We thank all the prophets and disciples who risked and gave their lives to pass along their faith through the generations to each of us. We thank all who have accepted a fatherly role for serving families and being an example of God's love. And we ask for God's grace to bless our summer adventures and protect us in his Son and through the Holy Spirit.