

Happy Father's Day! Today's readings put a whole new spin on "raising children."

In the first reading, think of God as the Father and his Chosen People as His children. In this reading we can learn a lot from how God sees the role of a FATHER. "If you harken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession." This scripture refers to the Mosaic Covenant where God supplies the Law, that is meant to govern and shape the people of Israel, as they journey to the promised land.

Fathers often take on the role of disciplinarian and lay down the LAW for their children. The law or rules of the house have the intent of creating harmony in the family as well as leading both children and parents to heaven. As God says, "You shall become a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." This gets especially interesting when children grow up and begin to push boundaries. At this point they are developing their skills as young arbitrators, seeking loopholes in law and questioning its authority...

Yet the second part of God's promise also applies, "You shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people." The father-to-child relationship is one of possession, as the father loves his children like no other and owns the challenge of "raising" his children.

This takes us to the gospel, where the words of Jesus summoning his disciples are synonymous with the call to fatherhood. This calling is the same whether as a biological father, a stepfather, an uncle, or a mentor.

In listing the names of the disciples, we hear the words, "Simon called Peter." Jesus, renames "Simon" the fisherman, to "Peter" the rock of his Church, long before Peter grows into his leadership role. In the same way, God gives a man with a child a new name, "Father," and sees him as the accomplished dad he will one day be, even while he is still putting on the diapers on backwards.

In Matthew's gospel, he carefully names each apostle individually and together they become, "The Apostles." Just like when my wife and I got married and started having kids, we became "The Kazmierowicz's." As a family unit grows, we find that each member contributes something different and the needs of each child are unique. There is also a sense of completeness when all the members are together in one place. I remember arriving at mass here at St James, about 18 years ago when we would sit with all of our kids behind the choir. We were running late that day, so I dropped the family off in front of the church and went to park the car in the St. James Academy playground. I hurried to our pew only to hear my white-faced wife say, "Where's the baby?" Well, when I got back to the car, he was patiently waiting for me to take him out of his car seat. I honestly thought about going to the cry room to avoid the embarrassment when the people around me noticed my serious blunder. The moral of the story is, 1) fathers, keep an account of all family members at all times and 2) try to get to mass on time so you don't overlook any important items!

Returning to the gospel, Jesus instructed them, "Do not go into pagan territory." This is another challenge of fatherhood, dealing with "pagan territory." For new dad's, especially those who are newly married, things that were OK when you were a bachelor are no longer OK when you have little people running around your home. This is where "Raising Children" takes on a new meaning. We are attempting to raise them up to a higher standard, to give them an elevated vantage point so when THEY go off and make lives of their own, they have a shorter, easier path to heaven. In this effort to make BETTER children, God's plan for fatherhood seems to be aimed at making us BETTER along the way.

Jesus goes on and asks the apostles to, "Cure the sick." As fathers, we are expected to address all types of ailments suffered by our children. From band aid application, cold and headache medication and a complete knowledge of the medical field.

The apostles were also instructed to, "Drive out demons." Again, fathers help their children face all types of demons, from bad dreams to anxiety, and potential addiction.

Finally, Jesus says, "Without cost you have received, without cost, you are to give." I'm sure this resonates with all dads out there. First of all, it's not cheap to have kids, with all the expenses from feeding teenagers to college tuition. But also, Fatherhood is a MOST DEMANDING undertaking. By contrast, when it comes to careers, we CHOSE to pursue something that we're both good at and enjoy. But in parenting we're often asked to do things we have no clue about. How does a dad like myself, who grew up with only brothers, address the challenge of having three daughters, especially when they were all teenagers at the same time? Fatherhood is a continuous session of on-the-job training, trying things and failing, waking up the next day, and trying something different. Let's take a moment to show our appreciation for all the fathers that are here with us today...

Jesus says, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

There are certain roles in our lives that directly involve, "Labor for the master," to collect his harvest of souls. These include fatherhood, motherhood, priesthood, grandparenthood, brotherhood, sisterhood, childhood, neighborhood, and servanthood. In all of these roles, we aim to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," and then, like a father does with his children, make that kingdom real, a kingdom where others can know Christ, even BEFORE they know they do.