

DAYS TO CELEBRATE

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Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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Saw a great headline the other day: “Justice Sotomayor praises Clarence Thomas as a ‘friend’ who ‘cares deeply about the court.’” While the Justice admitted that she and Justice Thomas disagree most among all the Justices about constitutional issues, she nonetheless expressed admiration for his concern for people. Embedded in that story was also: “Sotomayor and Thomas’ friendship is not unique among Supreme Court justices. The late Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia have often been held up as a triumph of friendship over partisan politics.” Hmmm ... quite the lesson for all of us.

On another note, a blessed Juneteenth to all—the anniversary, if Wikipedia is correct, of the “... anniversary date of the June 19, 1865, announcement of General Order No. 3 by Union Army General Gordon Granger, proclaiming freedom for enslaved people in Texas, which was the last state of the Confederacy with institutional slavery.” Thus, until recently, what had been a more Texas-specific celebration due to its origination, has been adopted as a federal holiday. Slavery is such a heinous evil, the dehumanization and objectification of persons as tools to serve their “masters.” To think that it endures even to this day in the world reminds us that the elimination of that abomination—and other human oppressions—is hardly over and will likely be a constant endeavor of humanity. A sad thought, yes, but an incentive for good people to work courageously for good.

As we are reminded of such things on Fathers’ Day, we recall a major role of parents: to teach their children to discern between good and evil. Christians consider themselves very fortunate, especially in this day and age of fluid standards of morality, to have their “guidebook”—the Bible, primarily the New Testament, which outlines the teachings of our namesake, Jesus, who we believe is the Christ ... the anointed, the Messiah of God. And what is it to be “Christian” except to imitate and follow the Way Christ taught by His words and example? We may *want* to believe ourselves faithful, but unless we meet the criteria for the definition, we are just lying to ourselves. And, if we can’t be honest with ourselves, with whom *will* we be honest?

And so, parents—you dads especially today—take that responsibility and privilege of teaching your kids with the utmost care, no matter their ages. We know all too well how there are many paths upon which they may tread, but the path you guide them toward will be among the greatest testaments of your lives. And, yes, they may stray at times, but always that foundation is laid in the recesses of their memory, no matter how dusty those memories may become. But if never provided that firm foundation of morality and the seeking of the good, they may fail to ever find a good path.

Naturally, the example *you* set is of primary importance. The “do what I say, not what I do” example fails. After all, most of us recognize how we begin morphing into our parents as we age—recalling, and often imitating gestures, phrases, attitudes, etc. So scrutinize attitudes you exhibit and ensure that they conform to what is truly good ... comport to the loving obedience of God and to love of neighbor. We remember the *one* command given directly by the Father in the New Testament: at the Transfiguration, in which He thunders of Jesus: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen* to Him.” (Matthew 17:5)

If the Christian does not follow Jesus but rather his own thoughts and judgment, not in agreement with Jesus’ teaching, is he really Christian? As Jesus inquires: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do what I tell you.” (Luke 6:46) Will He address *us* questioningly as He did the apostles when they were challenged with difficult teaching: “Will you also go away?” How can the true Christian *not* respond as did Peter: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68-69)

And, for you children, learn from your parents, realizing that they have 20, 30, or more years of life’s experience than you do. Hold before your mind’s eye the commandment: “Honor your father and your mother”—the first of the Ten Commandments that deals with persons, indicating its importance. And forgive their imperfections, for who among us *is* perfect? People put up with *your* imperfections; learn to put up with those of others.

And so, a few scripture verses we are wont to repeat on Mothers’ and Fathers’ Days—remembrances of those good paths which not only Christians are called to observe but are universal in their application:

1 Listen to me your father, O children; and act accordingly...

2 For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons.

3 Whoever honors his father atones for sins,

4 and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure.

5 Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays, he will be heard.

6 Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother...

8 Honor your father by word and deed, that a blessing from him may come upon you.

9 For a father’s blessing strengthens the houses of the children...

10 Do not glorify yourself by dishonoring your father, for your father’s dishonor is no glory to you.

11 For a man’s glory comes from honoring his father, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother.

12 O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives;

13 even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him.

14 For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you

...

(Sirach 3)

And a blessed Fathers’ Day to you all.