

## Fathers' Day Sermon

# “God gave us fathers. But why?”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

How did you, or how do you address your father? Father... Dad... It is a very emotion-loaded word, isn't it? Because our fathers are so important in our lives. Fathers are different.

Some may have seen their fathers too little. Some may have not seen them at all. Some may have the most beautiful memories of their relationships with their fathers, some may struggle to remember them, some may want to forget them.

For many their fathers used to be the strongest person in the world, their shield and rock. Their “super-men”! For some their fathers may have been the reason of deepest hurt. Some may have longed to get away from their fathers. Some may long to have been able to spend more time with them.

Each story is different. Each story is very personal and emotional. Whatever your story and your memories are, good or bad, joyful and sad, there is no doubt that our fathers have a unique role in our lives.

If you were asked to describe what the functions of fathers are, what would you say? Why did God give us fathers? For one, to provide security and stability in the family, to protect us. Sure, where did we run when we were afraid?

Who did we look for when we needed help? Our Dads. And as a result, children who have grown up with their fathers around are more confident and less anxious than those who have grown up without fathers.

Who do we expect to ensure order and obedience in the family? That's another one. “If you won't stop... or, if you don't do what I asked you... I'll tell your father.” Sounds familiar? Fathers are the embodiment of the law in a household.

They teach that there needs to be an order in the community and if you do wrong, if you disrupt that order, there are consequences. Again, children who grow up without fathers are much more likely to end up on a wrong path or in a prison for they haven't had the opportunity to learn those valuable lessons.

Yet another – fathers teach with their own example what it means to be a husband and a father, how to take on responsibility and how to lay down their lives for their wives and families, how to think of others first.

All these are important functions of fathers. I am sure we could come up with others as well. And as we can see even from this short list, the influence of fathers extends far into the lives of their children.

It is indeed a great privilege and a great responsibility to be a father. But today I want to talk about yet another function of fathers, which is at least as important as those we mentioned before, perhaps even more important.

Can you guess what it is? Fathers as spiritual leaders of their families, who are responsible for the faith of their spouse and their children. Yes! They are here to give their children the greatest gift – the gift of eternal life. They are responsible to teach and speak to them the Gospel and to live it out in their own lives.

I think and I hope that Christian fathers tend to fulfil the duties of fathers that we mentioned earlier more, or less faithfully. But what about this one? What about being spiritual leaders for their families?

What about teaching, speaking, and living out the Gospel? What about leading our spouses and our children to the Triune God, to Jesus in His Church? How well do we as fathers do that? How much are we even involved? Too often it seems that this responsibility is delegated to Moms, as something not that important for us.

I guess one reason why we are not better in what is our, I dare to say, the highest responsibility, for it has eternal consequences, – is that it is quite hard, quite challenging, and we often don't know how to do it.

And to teach and speak and to live out the Gospel of God's grace is not easy. It is much easier to be the voice of the Law in the house. I love it. When something goes wrong, it is almost a joyful experience when you can scream as loud as you can and command everyone back in line. That's fun.

Or when someone has done something wrong, to tell them how wrong it was, and to pronounce some terrifying judgement. "No mobile phone for three days!" Or: "You are not going to that birthday party!" And order and justice are restored. Good job, 'spiritual leader', well done!

It is much more difficult to show grace. And by that I don't mean to ignore the wrong that has been done. We tend to confuse it. We may think that to be gracious and loving is to pretend that nothing wrong was done. No, that's not grace.

We speak the Gospel, we live out the Gospel, when we forgive. When our child comes to us after they have embarrassed us, disobeyed us, brought disgrace to our family and now feel really bad and burdened under the joke of guilt and shame...

And we say to them: "I forgive you, I love you, I will always be with you, I will never give up on you." It is hard to speak the Gospel, when the only thing you may experience at that moment is anger and disappointment.

It takes that strength that comes from Jesus to be able to speak these words. It takes the help of the Holy Spirit. But this is what we as fathers are called to do. It is hard to forgive those little gangsters, whom you teach and teach... and they still manage to mess up and hurt you deeply. But you know what is even harder?

To ask for forgiveness. Yes! It is hard even to admit that we, fathers, could make any mistakes, that we could actually sin against our spouses or children. Because we are the heads of our households and we are always right. Aren't we?!

But we do sin, and we do make mistakes, and sometimes really bad ones and they hurt those who are entrusted to us, to our care, to our spiritual leadership. What do we do? I guess the easy thing is to pretend that nothing happened.

Time will pass, and everything will be back as it was. Sort of. Hopefully. But what are we to do if we want to be truly spiritual leaders after God's own heart, if we want to teach with our example about Jesus and our gracious Father in heaven?

We are to ask for forgiveness. I know, we need all the strength of the Holy Spirit to break our pride and to humble ourselves to ask for forgiveness to those who are dependent on us, even to our own children.

But remember this. Jesus assumed responsibility for all our failings. All our sins were placed on His shoulders. He has taken all the guilt for our sins away, we are already forgiven, we are free from this burden of sin and guilt.

When we know this, when the Holy Spirit assures this is true, this Good News makes it easier for us to ask for forgiveness to those we have sinned against, for we know that the One whose judgment matters the most, already has forgiven us. It is Him who enables us to ask for forgiveness without hesitation.

But then there is more that we should do. We are to teach and speak the Gospel to our families as much as we can. Both with our actions, and also with our words. The Gospel is the love language of the Triune God.

He loves us, His little creatures, He speaks His love to us through His Son, and He sends us to speak His love to one another. Fathers to their children, husbands to their wives, and all of us to all people in our lives. How do we do it?

I guess this is what we need to continue learning and practicing. This is where we need to use the collective wisdom of the Church. We can begin by repeating what the Holy Spirit speaks in God's own letter to us, the Bible.

This is what we should remind our children and to one another: "You are created in God's own image and likeness. You are infinitely precious in God's eyes. Your Father Himself has formed you in your mothers' womb, He cares for you and always watches over you. You are accepted and valued by Him as you are.

And regardless of what others, or even what you think about yourself, you are His treasure. His beloved. He loves you unconditionally. Your God Jesus loves you so much, that He gave up His life for you.

Remember, He has chosen you from before the foundation of the world. He has chosen you to be with Him in Paradise. And nothing will stop Jesus from loving you. And regardless of how many times you fail, He will never, never turn away from you. He will never forget you, He will always walk with you, rejoice in your joys, and be heartbroken when you are heartbroken.

He is closer to you than you can dream about. He has bound you to Himself by His Spirit indwelling in you. Even if we don't understand one another and our struggles fully, Jesus does and is here to comfort you.

Whatever situation you may face, whatever dangers or threats, whatever oppression, your Father is stronger and He will shield you and protect you. Whatever befalls you, nothing will separate you from your Father's love.

As He has given you life, He also longs to see how you grow in His wisdom and become a blessing to many. He believes in you, for He knows what you are capable of in His power, and He delights in seeing how you gradually become that glorious being who He intended you to be. Remember how He looks at you: "You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased!"

Let's practice speaking these things to one another, as fathers to our children, and as spouses to our best halves, and to our fellow saints. And let's practice treating one another in a way that expresses in actions what we say in words.

For this is how we begin to fulfil our calling as spiritual leaders. Is it easy? You know the answer. It is hard. Are we up to it? No! It takes more that our fallen flesh can give us. This is why we as fathers fail so often.

We fail our spouses; we fail our children. We fail them by not living as Christian fathers, as people of the Gospel. And that is why we as fathers also need to experience the support and unconditional love of our Father in heaven.

We need to know that there are no conditions for us to be loved. That we too are good enough for our Father. That He accepts us and forgives us. That He invites us and longs to embrace us. That He rejoices and delights in us.

We need to hear His encouragement that one day we all, ourselves and our children will stand before Him, and experience fully what it means to be loved by the Father of Jesus, by our Father who is in heaven.

Till that day, may our dear Father in heaven strengthen us with His Spirit, with His life-giving Word, with His Sacrament in the community of God's saints and grant us patience and humility and grace, and whatever else is needed, so that we can continue to lead our loved ones to the One who is the Father of us all.

Amen.