

Opening Prayer:

God, help our dads to be drawn to you often, be a man of integrity and courage, impart wisdom and guidance, find common ground with their children, be intentional and involved, train with love and patience, be a responder not a reactor, be humble when he falters, and help each of his children find their calling. Amen.

Talk:

“I believe in God, the Father the Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.”

Who knows this prayer?...Yes, it's the Apostle's Creed. We say a variation of this every Sunday and sometimes twice on Thursday when we pray as a community the Nicene Creed, who knows the first line we pray - *We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of all that is, seen and unseen.* The difference is minor, but the profession of faith remains so profound – affirming our belief in an entity, God, who we call Father. There are two words I want to focus on for the remainder of this talk GOD and FATHER.

In case you didn't know this...I am a father, not a perfect father, but an earthly father who strives to be a model to his children. There are many different kinds of fathers. There are biological fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, godfathers, spiritual fathers and even our priests. There are fathers who like sports, fathers who are good at business, fathers who are “fun” and fathers who always seem serious and fathers who are a mix of everything. Many of us are blessed to have fathers who provide for us and take care of us. However, some fathers struggle to take care of our needs or we may lose our father through divorce, death or other tragic means. But, like me, all earthly fathers fall short of perfection...it's just the way it is, perhaps by design.

The Creed begins by professing belief in God the Father, our Creator. In the Old Testament, when God is referred to as “Father,” it is a term to indicate his strength and that He is the Father of creation. Jesus is the one who taught us to call God “Father,” because we are His children. Jesus taught us to call God “Abba Father.” The word abba is actually similar to the word we have “daddy.” We are to have the child-like faith to see God as our Father – the one who loves us and provides for us.

Jesus can call God “Father” because that is His relationship to God, the Son and the Father. However, Jesus invites US to call God Father as well. Wow! What impactful relational transference has just occurred? This means Jesus is putting us in the same relationship with God – and so we, too, can call God, our Father, our heavenly Father.

God is our Father in the sense that He created us and all things, seen and unseen. God is the one who created us in the beginning. Just as a painter is the “father” of his art, so is God the Father of us.

All of creation speaks to the glory of God in heaven. We can see beauty in the world around us and know that all of it comes from God. When God created, he called it good. God created man so that he may worship and adore God. This was our purpose from the beginning and this is why we are called to worship God everyday and to go to Mass every Sunday. (*Colossians 3:16-17*) *Let the word of Christ dwell in you*

richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

But God is not merely our creator. Jesus tells us to call God Father because that is the type of relationship that God wants with us – a Father that loves His children. Our Father desires for us to be happy. Sometimes we try to find happiness without Him, but true happiness, true peace only comes from having a relationship with God.

In the beginning of the night, we talked about how fathers love, provide and sometimes fall short. God the Father never falls short. He is the perfect Father and He desires to provide for us in every way that we long for. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the love that a father has for his children. Our experience with our own father may make it difficult to see God as good. Our earthly fathers are human and make mistakes. Our heavenly Father is perfect. He loves you perfectly – not because of anything you’ve done. God loves you because “God is love.” This is why we need good witnesses in our faith to show us the love of the heavenly Father.

Our earthly fathers, or father figures, are called to be those good witnesses. When I say father, what words come to mind?

- Leader
- Provider
- Teacher
- Listener
- Security
- Strong
- Brave
- Faith
- Counselor
- Guide
- Love
- Warmth
- Knowledge
- Comforting

As I said in the beginning of our talk, I’m a father - A father of two wonderful children, Andrea and Aaron. However, believe it or not, long ago I was in 8th grade like many of you are or will be. I too have a father that taught me how to do many things and guided me in my faith. I began my journey as a father 11 short years ago and it was both an exciting time and scary time as a whole new world opens and a new lifestyle enters...one of responsibility, guidance and faith. As a father I strive to be all this and much more to my children, because I am called to do so. But fulfilling that call by our heavenly Father does not come easily, or without challenges, but does bring me much joy despite my many imperfections. Andrea is my oldest at 11 going on 19 and loves to run cross country and track, playing music (she is currently learning the flute), reading and playing video games. Of my two children she is definitely the shyer one, but if you open up to her she will be your best friend. Aaron, who is 7, is my little party in a bottle. He loves his Krav Maga class (a form of karate), math, reading, playing video games, giving warm hugs to anyone he encounters, so long

as it doesn't interfere with his video games, food (this is often combined with playing video games) and just has a happy disposition. As a father, it is important for me to understand each of their talents and abilities and provide guidance that will help them in life. But I will not lie, there are many challenges that come with being a father, challenges that must be countered.

Intolerance / Impatience – Acceptance / Contentment

(Colossians 3:21) tells us “*Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged*”. I believe this passage is a reminder from God the Father to me that, like me, my children are not perfect and my role is to encourage them in their passion and times of struggle. All too often I forget that though and get caught up in my unrealistic drive for perfection, just my competitive nature I guess. Whether it be in my mind Andrea not competing well in a cross country or track meet or Aaron not focusing in his Krav Maga class, or a poor grade on a test, or just plain not listening, these are just small ticks in time that sometimes get to me. I constantly have to remind myself that my role is to encourage my children in their goals and accept who are and who they will become just as our heavenly Father accepts me.

Procrastination – Action / Teach

Procrastination is the devil's way of distracting us from what we need to do...I'll get to that tomorrow...I don't have time for that right now, I have all this to do...in order for “x” to happen I need “y” and “z” so I may as well wait until later and later never comes. As a father, that distraction can be work, unessential tech stuff, TV, friends...yes, friends can be a distraction when we can't so no.

As a father of faith, I am called to act and teach the same values to my children as my father did with me. When problems arise in their lives we apply our Catholic principles in an attempt to resolve it. I try to make opportunities to spend time with my children, whether it be going on a walk, playing catch, going to the movie, or going camping, whatever it may be, I always try to talk with them and encourage questions. We always pray before meals and when we remember, tell each other a high and low point of the day. To me, it is these small actions that strengthen my relationship as a father to Andrea and Aaron and it puts into perspective my relationship with our heavenly Father. Do not be afraid to ask questions of your father – they are there to provide guidance and direction.

Love - Sacrifice

Father's make sacrifices for their kids all the time – you may not always realize it, but they do, and it is done out of love. (John 3:16) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. While the list of sacrifices I've made for my kids is long, none are comparable to giving up my only son. Sacrifices go beyond driving your children to practices. Sometimes these sacrifices include the smallest of things to you, but are actually much larger to the father. Here's a story...

There was a time when Andrea was 5 that she became violently ill, unable to keep anything down and with an escalating fever, and not a little fever, but 104 degree fever. The type a fever where just holding her burned your hands as you rushed into the hospital. After many tests over the course of a whole weeks stay at Riverview we learned that she had a kidney infection. I naturally, took the week off to be with her at the hospital, because in the face of being helpless – where nothing you can do will help a situation – dads (at least me) turn to providing comfort...and that is what I did. Now it just so happened that during that week I had a HUGE meeting with important agencies on a project I was working on in Terre Haute. With agencies like the US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Natural

Resources, the Department of Environmental Management and the US Army Corps of Engineers...and they were all coming to hear me talk about environmental impacts resulting from changes made to this big project. Of course my focus was on my daughter, not preparing for this meeting. And while I was able to make it through the meeting without any huge explosions, it was obvious preparation was lacking. I don't know if Andrea was ever aware of the stress I was under, but to be honest, she didn't need to be. It was my sacrifice to be made as a father, much like many of those unseen sacrifices made by our heavenly Father on our behalf. How often do you inquire of your earthly father about the sacrifices they have made and why? How often do you reflect on our heavenly Fathers sacrifices for us? Answering these questions help us strengthen the relationship between us and our fathers.

Honesty

Just as it is with our heavenly Father, a relationship with our fathers can't be forged without honesty. And honesty starts with being honest with oneself. People are, by nature, loving, but are also cautious and skeptics – we must always see things to believe it, right?. Growing up there were many times I questioned my relationship with God the Father, just as many of you probably have – trying to attach strings to my relationship with Him – if you truly love me, you'll let my team win the state championship. What happens then...You lose the state championship, right? Then what? You move on and double down later – if you truly love me you'll let me ace my math test...and it keeps going and so on and so on. But what's really happening is we're not being honest with ourselves and accepting the loving relationship God offers us, but we keep trying to trick God into proving that a) He is real and b) He loves us. I'm reminded of an old Chinese parable about an old wise man that lived on the hill:

The Old Wise Man!

High in the Himalayan mountains lived a wise old man.

Periodically, he ventured down into the local village to entertain the villagers with his special knowledge and talents. One of his skills was to "psychically" tell the villagers the contents in their pockets, boxes, or minds.

A few of the villagers decided to trick the wise old man and discredit his special abilities.

The following week, the wise old man came down from the mountain into the village. One of the villagers quickly caught a bird and cupping it out of sight in his hands, walked up to the wise old man and asked, "Old man, old man, what is it that I have in my hands?"

The wise old man said, "Why you have a bird." "Correct," said the villager.

The villager then asked, "Old man, old man tell me, is the bird alive or is it dead?"

Now the old wise man knew if he were to say the bird was alive, the villager would crush the bird in his hands, so that when he opened them the bird would be dead; if he were to say the bird was dead, the villager would open his hands and let the bird fly free. So no matter what the old man said, the villagers would prove him to be a fraud. The wise old man looked down and with the wisdom of the ages slowly raised his eyes to meet the villagers and said,

"The bird is as you will it."

Now we can draw tangents and say the old wise man was God and we are the villagers and God gives us free will and we act accordingly, but that is a whole other discussion for another day – and honestly much deeper than I want to take this talk. The point I do want to make is that as a father there are times I have to be honest with myself and my kids and step back and allow their will to take over. Sometimes they fall, sometimes they succeed, but at all times they learn. Perhaps, that is what our heavenly Father is doing when he doesn't answer us the way we want him to.

So taking what we've talked about, how can you have a better relationship with your father or father figure in your life? Well, I would say the first thing you should do is invite them to be part of your life. That invitation is sometimes implied just because of the biological father – son/daughter relational connection, but it is good for us fathers to hear it from our children that they want us involved in their life. Secondly, arrange quality time with them. Hey dad, do you want to go get some ice cream, or do you want to go on a walk, or do you want to through the ball around. As I told you, dads are human, they get very busy in their lives and sometimes forget about the importance of the smallest of things, and need that reminder from you that you're interested in them. I can go on and on, but I do want to wrap this up soon, but, lastly, take every opportunity to ask questions of them. This doesn't have to be questions about homework, in fact there are time we prefer it not be, but can be about how to handle a problem at school, or about taking on a hobby, or about something you read about in a magazine or heard about in the news, or how to get involved in a community project, or about our Catholic faith. The point is that you know your father was, at one time, your age and has asked many of the same questions and encountered many of the same situations and is always there to help. He may not know the answers to all the questions, but trust me, he's willing to try. Just as we see our dads as being important in our life, whether said or unsaid, viewing God as a Father in our faith life has similar value. It all starts with that invitation for Him to come into our life, and talking with Him through prayer or reconciliation, and going to and participating in Mass. Like the father of the prodigal son, God's love and mercy for us is everlasting...and it's perfect.

Closing Prayer:

Let's close with the prayer our Father taught us – Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.