

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

3rd Sunday of Pentecost
June 20, 2004
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Fathers, Past and Present”

Today is the third Sunday of Pentecost. It is also Father’s Day. Tomorrow is the longest day of the year and the summer has officially begun. Today we pause to pay attention and give time to fathers. For those still lucky enough to have their father with them, there will be telephone calls, cards, gifts, and special meals. Fishing poles, penknives, books, and materials, guns and power tools make good presents! Socks, underwear, sweaters, and shirts we sort of tolerate and say: “how nice!”

And for those of us whose fathers have passed on, well we have memories don’t we! Christmases long past, vacations by the shore, and camping by the woods. The first fishing trip with just dad and you; riding in the truck; going to pick out a puppy dog, learning to cut wood, playing for the school for the first time and turning to see him in the stands. Watching him growing older and how frustrated he became when he could no longer do the things he used to do. Seeing him lost in his memories for hours at a time and wondering where he went to in those moments. Was he revisiting old battles in some long ago war or some adventure in his youth?

And as his years came to an end, seeing the man you always thought of as superman decline and slow to where he leaned on you.

Dylan Thomas, the welsh poet, looked after his father till his dying days and as he lay dying he wrote:

“Do not go gentle into that good night old age should rage at close of day, rage, rage against the dying of the light!”

But as the years go by we all begin to realize that we become our father. Gestures we make, sayings we have, jokes we tell, old things we love, songs we have, tunes we know, old poems, and old television shows.

My father watched Lucy and Mr. Ed. He couldn’t stand Monty Python or Benny Hill, but fell off his chair watching Laurel and Hardy or Charlie Chaplin. He loved Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and Jack Benny but couldn’t understand what was funny about Woody Allen.

He would spend hours at antique auctions and fairs and study a crossword puzzle after dinner as if world peace depended on it. He had a special way with children and could make rabbits from a handkerchief that would run up his arms. He could make coins disappear and re-emerge behind your ear and he could systematically take all your money playing poker – and laugh about it.

Father’s Day is full of memories for many of us. But the strongest of those memories was seeing the man we thought of as so strong and so big in our lives – kneel to pray. It was

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd

and

St. John the Evangelist

then we knew where our faith came from and the heritage of old that lay deep within us; the hidden strength that brought us through war and peace, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a child. Christian fathers seem to have a special covenant with God, much as Abraham did. A covenant where they exchange faith for the strength to shoulder awesome responsibility that they carry till the day they die.

The story of Jesus' life is the story of a son in continuous dialogue with his father. All his motivation, all his power seems to come from those precious moments he spends in prayer with his father. He strives to do the Father's will. He offers up the disciples he had chosen in a prayer to the Father, praying that He will strengthen and guide them and send his Spirit to them.

Today this must be our prayer, too, for all the fathers of our parish. To be a father is to be a friend, a teacher and a guide to someone who always seems to look up to you. At least that is the way it was always depicted in the movies. Was it James Stuart who was the father in Spencer Mountain and Maureen O'Hara who was the mother? Fathers always seemed to get it right in movies like that. Sad to say, days have changed. Kids know a lot at 12 years of age; they know everything at 16, and are impossible at 17! Dads now have feel of clay. Like Santa Claus and Superman, Dads are harder to find and impossible to convince your teenager that you are he! You can still have a moment of childlike admiration if you can change the brake shoes on his car, but it's only fleeting. The good news is that special relationship you once had with your cherished offspring comes back. You have to wait awhile, but one day – after the wedding, after the first baby. The telephone begins to ring in the night again. He'll arrange fishing trips to pump you for the answer to why she cries for no reason and why he's to blame.

It's then you repeat the garbage your dad told you on a similar fishing day. "Son! Women are a mystery! You see God made them like that to keep us humble. Don't try to figure it out. Better men than you have tried. Give them anything they want. Keep your mouth shut and go fishing."

That's what he said – but he had no clue what he was talking about. He just said it so often that now he believed it.

In today's Eucharist, we celebrate fathers. We have gratitude for the faith they gave us. The stories they told us. The love they shared with us. We pray that they find rest with their ancestors where the fish bite and evenings are long in restful inns: drinking pints of English beer and telling longer stories. And when we too come to that good night, we pray for grace to lie in the arms of those we love!

"I will arise and go now and go to Innisfree, and to a cabin built there of wood and wattles made. Mine beanrows will I have there and a hive for the honeybee and live alone in the bee loud glade."

Amen +

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383