

The Gift and Art of Fatherhood

Into Your Hands | *Archbishop Robert G. Casey*

I remember the first time I did something that made me realize I had become just like my father. Many of us have had similar experiences. We reach a certain age and the DNA that has been passed down from generation to generation becomes undeniable. A wife may say something to her husband and realize she sounds just like her mother. A father may say something to his children and hear the voice of his own father coming out of his mouth.

Some years ago, while visiting Ireland, I walked into a room, raised my hand, and greeted all who were present. The way I gestured to them, with a certain tilt of my head and manner of speaking, reminded everyone of my grandfather. This surprised me, since I never knew my grandfather. Yet, he lives on through my DNA. Family and friends in Ireland could recognize him in my traits and mannerisms.

Fatherhood, however, is more art than science. The science of it is quite simple. Mix some DNA of a father with some DNA of a mother and produce a child. Yet, once that child has life, the role of fatherhood becomes much less simple. From day one, there are choices to be made and opportunities to be grasped.

To become a good father, a man must root his life in faith, hope, and love. Each day must be seen as an opportunity to perfect the art of parenting, giving one's children the example of a life spent in continuous learning. Within our families, we have some inheritance that we treasure and some that must be discarded. Learning how to break the habits and customs that hurt more than heal the bonds

of family becomes an important endeavor for every father in his effort to become accomplished in the art of fatherhood.

The familiar phrase “like father, like son” reveals a powerful truth about fatherhood. At first glance, that phrase speaks to the traits, characteristics, and mannerisms that are handed down through our DNA. Viewed from a different perspective, though, that phrase calls us to greater love and reconciliation in our families. Do we like our father? Do we like our son? Can that “like” be deepened into love? The well-known story of the Prodigal Son demonstrates how a father can learn to like and love his children in sunshine and in shadow. And, when a father has developed a deep love, rooted in God’s love for us, he can teach his children how to weather life’s storms and not be shaken.

The *Shema* is the daily Jewish prayer taught to children to remind them that life must be rooted in faith in God. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God! The Lord is One!” (Dt 6:4). Each morning as we begin our day and each night before we sleep, we pray that we may live according to our faith and love as God loves. A father’s love for his children, essential and enduring, becomes a reflection of the love of God our Father, who will not disown us even amidst deep disappointment.

As we celebrate Father’s Day this month, we pray for our fathers, living and deceased, asking God’s blessing upon them, whether that be for their eternal rest or their continued journey here on earth. As we consider the love of God that we have come to know through our fathers, and the example they did or did not provide us, we pray, too, for all those who will be given the gift of fatherhood. May they receive that gift with humility and gratitude. And may they learn how to mirror the love of God in their life, so that future generations may come to know God our Father as a loving provider, protector, and pardoner.

