

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
June 16-17, 2018  
St. Mary's Church, Richmond  
Fr. Michael Renninger

The father of the groom was crying. Dad was standing in the corner of the Cathedral, watching his son and the whole wedding party pray together just before the rehearsal started. The son had gathered the groomsmen and bridesmaids around the baptismal font. Then the groom started to pray. He thanked God for the gift of his bride, and prayed that he would be a generous husband. He also asked God to make him a faith-filled father, so that he could effectively introduce his children to Jesus once they were born.

The groom's father was in the corner, crying. I walked over to him, and dad simply pointed to his son and said, "I am so proud of him. He grew up to be a man of faith, and man of integrity. He loves his fiancée, he loves the Lord and the church. Look at him, leading his friends in prayer. Where did he learn to do all this?"

And without hesitation, I said, "He learned it by watching you."

What dad did not know was this: during my meetings with this bride and groom, the groom had said, "My dad I my hero." The son told me that when he was growing up, he loved to *watch* his dad. He said that many of the most important things he had learned in life, he learned by watching his dad.

He watched his dad kneeling by his bed in prayer every night. He watched his dad receiving communion every Sunday. He watched his dad going to confession. He watched his dad, leading the family in prayer before every meal, even when they were out to dinner.

He watched his dad working hard every day, but making time for his family every night.

And most of all, he watched his dad being a husband. He saw that his dad rarely spoke harshly to his wife – at least not in front of the kids. How he and his wife worked patiently together in raising the children. How they worked through the hard times, laughed in the good times, and created a home where love and faith were valued above any material possession.

I knew all that, because the son told me about it during the marriage preparation meeting. So when dad said to me, "where did he learn all this? How did he become such a good person?" I had the privilege of saying, "He learned it from you...from your daily example of being a good Christian, a good husband, a good father."

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of God. Jesus gives us an image that is meant to draw us in to the mystery. It's an invitation for us to participate in the growth and spread of God's kingdom here and now.

'The kingdom,' Jesus says, 'is like a farmer who plants seed in the ground. He does what a farmer should do – he scatters the seed.' But then, Jesus says, *something happens*. Time passes, and the seed begins to grow. The plant sprouts and grows stronger, and finally the harvest comes. And all this happens, Jesus says, without the farmer truly understanding HOW it happens. If you asked the farmer – 'how did this great harvest grow?' He would answer: 'I don't know how.'

That dad at the Cathedral said, 'I don't know how my son learned all this.' But I knew – his son learned it all because the father did what he was supposed to do. His dad was faithful, and loving, and good...and that became the seed for his son's goodness.

How does the Kingdom of God grow? On one hand, we will never know – because it is not our kingdom, it is God's. God is in charge. Christ reveals the truth. The Spirit leads us day by day. The Lord can take the smallest act of kindness, and multiply it beyond our imagining. God can act through one person, and transform nations. God can act through one parish, and change thousands of lives. And in the end – we don't know how God does it.

But on the other hand – we *do* know how God works. We *do* know how Christ's Spirit changes lives. It happens when one person decides to live a life focused on what is truly important. Like when a son is able to watch his father being prayerful, faithful and good. When a daughter is able to watch her mother being strong, loving and wise. When a neighbor is able to watch a neighbor doing the just and Godly thing. The seed of the kingdom is sewn when one of us makes the decision – "I am going to *do* what is right, and *say* what is right, and stand for what is right." Others will watch. Others will learn. Others will grow into the kingdom.

St. Paul says in today's second reading: "We aspire to please God. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and receive recompense, according to what we did while we have a body." In other words – our actions have consequences, now, and in eternity. Knowing that, we understand that *the things worth doing are the things that please the Lord*. And if we try to *live* like that, others will watch, and others will learn.

Then, before you know it, we are not alone in living the values of the Kingdom of God. More folks will have learned how to say 'yes' to life, and 'no' to violence. How to say 'yes' to justice, and 'no' to greed. How to say 'yes' to caring for others, and 'no' to self-centered living. How to say 'yes' to patience, 'yes' to forgiveness, 'yes' to faithfulness, 'yes' to truth, 'yes' to Christ.

On weekends such as Mother's Day and Father's Day, many of us find ourselves thinking about

the people who planted the important seeds in us which helped us to grow into the people we've become.

My own dad taught me, and continues to teach me, what a life of integrity and dedication looks like. My mother taught me, and from her place in heaven continues to teach me, what a life of faithful ministry and selfless love looks like. I think of the spiritual fathers who taught me what effective priesthood could look like: Bishop Sullivan, Msgr. Charles Kelly.

I think of all of the married men, whose dedication to their spouses and children inspires me. I think of the holy men and women who, without knowing it, have planted a seed of hope or inspiration in me.

Anything good that I do, I do because someone planted a good seed of the Kingdom of Heaven in me. Anything sinful that I do, I do because I have not allowed the good seed of the Kingdom to grow the way it should in me.

It is important to mention that dynamic, because our modern culture approaches things in precisely the OPPOSITE way! If we do something good, we are told to take complete credit for it. If we do something bad, lots of therapist will tell you that it is not your fault. If you do something bad, just blame your parents! But that's not how it works in the Kingdom of God. Now that I am 55 years old, I understand – whatever good I'm able to do, it is because someone else planted a good seed in me. If I do what is wrong, it's because I chose to hinder the good harvest!

In the end, the world will be changed, and the kingdom will fully come, when the good seed of faith planted with us bears a rich harvest. For now, perhaps we could take a moment to thank God for the dads and moms, heroes and helpers, friends and family, who have helped us to know and love Christ Jesus.

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