

Here we are on Father's Day and we want to celebrate all the virtues that make up a good father. Qualities like strength, endurance, and dependability come to mind. Perhaps we think of wisdom. There's also defender, provider, and rescuer. The stereotypical image of the ideal dad is someone who is always there - rock solid.

When I was a kid and I was around my dad I was never afraid. We used to go fishing in the Susquehanna River. In the stretch of the river near our house it was a mile wide and varied in depth from ten inches to about three feet. Rocks and rock ledges protrude up all over the place. Only here and there were there deep holes - which is where all the good fish were to be found. You didn't need a boat to fish. You just waded out. I believe I was elementary school age the day we waded almost all the way across the river and a severe thunderstorm came up suddenly. Lightning flashed, thunder boomed, and rain poured from the sky. Wading a mile in a treacherous river bottom is no fast trek. But other than being annoyed that I was soaking wet I wasn't scared. I was with my dad and he would take care of everything.

In hindsight of course he did take care of everything. We eventually made it back safely avoiding all the deep holes and not getting struck by lightning. But also in hindsight I realize he was probably pretty anxious - nowhere near as in control as I felt he was.

If we turn to our first Bible reading for today we find a father who's getting a severe dressing down by God. You may remember from the beginning of the story that Job is a very wealthy married man with ten children. Then, all in one day several natural disasters destroy all of Job's property and kills all ten of his children. Sometime after that Job develops sores on his skin from head to toe and he is in excruciating pain. Some of Job's friends come to commiserate. He moans and asks why did all this bad stuff happen? His friends tell him he must have done something wrong and God is punishing him. He maintains his innocence throughout. But eventually - after 37 chapters of debate - God answers Job. We read the beginning of it as our first lesson, and it isn't a pretty answer. Just listen again to God's opening words, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me."

Well, now that's not a very nice Father's Day message! All Job has done is basically to ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" And God goes off on him. God's response goes on like that for a total of four chapters!

In my own pastoral care I've never said to a hurting person who asked why life is the way it is, "Put up and shut up!"

There are two deep and powerful truths behind God's response to Job. Both are things we know, but bear reminding of. First, the world is a vast and complex place. That's what Job was forgetting. It didn't revolve around him. And it doesn't revolve around our lives either. The forces of nature, the forces of social trends, the decisions of other human beings, and on and on - all have impacts on us. It is too much for our minds to comprehend.

God reminded Job who really was in control, and who could see it all, because in the grand scheme of things Job wasn't all that much. That's not a nice Father's Day message either!

But there is a good Father's Day message in all of this. At the end does God leave Job abandoned to his devastated life and bad health? No. It is restored to him. If we turn to our

gospel reading we find something similar. The disciples are in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee. Notice that they aren't on some nighttime pleasure cruise. They're in the boat because Jesus himself said, "Let us go across to the other side." So, they're definitely doing God's work here. But a windstorm arises that frightens these guys - some of them being seasoned fishermen.

I don't want to dwell on it too much, but let's not ignore that point either. Doing God's work doesn't guarantee an easy or a safe passage. All too often we expect God to clear the path for us when we're doing his work, but not so.

Jesus is amazingly asleep in the stern. You'd think the violent rocking a sea spray would have wakened him, but apparently he's enjoying a good night's rest. They awaken him and notice carefully the order of events. The first thing Jesus does is speak to the sea, "Peace, be still!" These are the same sort of words Jesus uses when casting out demons. Then the wind ceases and there is a dead calm. Only then does Jesus say, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Notice Jesus doesn't upbraid them for their lack of faith first. First he addresses the danger. Then it is time for

reflection. And the disciples do get it. Their lack of faith was their lack of understanding of who Jesus fully was. They saw him as a preacher and teacher. They saw him as a charismatic leader who could do some miracles. But up until now they didn't fully get it. This Jesus who was in the boat with them had power over the wind and the waves. Think back to the power of God in our first reading. Only now are they starting to realize his full power. This was the power of God to control the forces of nature.

Ultimately they don't get it, yet. If they would have gotten it they would have understood the crucifixion as it happened, for the God who controls the wind and the waves also is God over death. It would take the resurrection for them to fully get it.

Even so, are they punished for their lack of faith? No. Was Job punished for his lack of faith? No. Like a good and forgiving father, God our Heavenly Father does truly have power, and that power is used to save us; not condemn us.

As a child I had ignorant faith in my father. He wanted to be a good dad, and he tried his best. But at the end of the day

he was a mere mortal who was also prone to failure. I didn't think so then, but I learned in time.

God is not prone to failure. So even when you know you're doing the will of God and storms still come up that threaten to sink you, God has not abandoned you.

And even though we humans really be insignificant little ants crawling all over the earth, God sees us and knows us and cares for us. Perhaps divine protection will come to save us from danger. Perhaps it will not. But that does not mean God cares for us any less or that God is less powerful. It just means that God is greater than ourselves, and while we can question and doubt, God's still got it all under control.

Let us thank God, our Heavenly Father, for his love towards us. Let us also respect and fear God, our Heavenly Father, for his great strength and power. For while God is gracious and merciful, such power always commands respect. And ultimately let us know God's power gives us value, for God seeks to use his power to empower us to carry out his will. Amen