

The Importance of Mothers and Fathers

by Archbishop William E. Lori

No one loves us quite so tenderly and persistently as our mothers. Where would we be without them? They are the glue that holds families together. Even though Mother's Day is past, it is never too late to pay tribute to our mothers, living and dead, and to commend them to the Lord. Let me wager, however, that good mothers desire, more than anything else, good husbands and fathers. They deserve husbands who are loving and faithful. Mothers understand how important a father's love and example is for their children. And wives know that if they are united with their husbands in faith, values and their understanding of how to raise their family, their children will more easily grow and develop as God intended.

Good fathers sense this too. They know that loving and respecting their wives is also important for children. The love of mothers and fathers is complementary. Fathers have their own brand of strong and tender love that goes along with and completes the love that mothers have for their children.

TV and Reality

Together, loving husbands and wives create a space of safety, stability and nurturing for their children. Within this zone, they can hand on the faith of the Church and help their children develop spiritually, intellectually, psychologically and physically. Parents can also be role models who help their children come to understand how men and women relate to one another in a healthy, respectful manner.

Today, when we watch reruns of old family sitcoms such as *Leave it to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*, we think of such shows as quaint, over idealized portraits of what family life was in the 1950's and '60s. Even then, it was rare for a stay-at-home mom to do housework while wearing pearls and high heels, or for a dad to wear a tie around the house. The wisdom that the parents dispensed to their children on those TV shows can seem a little stilted to our 21st century ears.

By contrast, contemporary sitcoms often present fractured families or "traditional" families in which both the husband and wife are silly and foolish. This is especially true of fathers, who are seldom portrayed as intelligent, wholesome, positive influences on their children. Even if we don't watch these shows, their influence is all around us in popular culture.

Baby boomers (of which I am one) may think that the Church wants all families to be like those TV sitcom families of old. At the same time more than a few millennials may think that the Church's teaching on marriage and family is hopelessly out of touch. But the Church's teaching doesn't take its cues from flickering screens, whether they're old 12 inch televisions or iPads. Rather, the Church knows from reason, experience and revelation how important husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, are for the flourishing of children and society. The definitions of husband, wife, father and mother cannot be changed at will. This has to do with the structure of reality; "it's how things are." Furthermore, the Church recognizes that marriage is an image of God's whole relationship with His people. The Church is the bride of Christ and our spiritual mother.

Social Experimentation

I have been a priest for 36 years. Along the way, I have come to understand more profoundly how God blessed me from my youth with a loving family. I have also enjoyed the friendship of many families who live the vocation of marriage and family amid the struggles and joys of life. These families have taught me a lot about the title of "father" that is accorded to priests. We are called to be like good and loving fathers to the families of faith that we have been sent to serve.

How many societal problems would be headed off if husbands were attentive to their wives and present to their children! What a different scene it would be for so many children if they had the joy and security of sitting down to dinner with their parents and siblings with some regularity!

Often in distressed neighborhoods, it is the fathers who are missing. All too often, mothers must raise their children alone. Many do so heroically, and they deserve our respect, support and prayers. Yet, it should always be our hope and prayer that the number of strong, intact and loving families will grow.

As of this writing, we are awaiting decisions from the U.S. Supreme court that, one way or another, will affect the future of marriage. Already so-called same-sex marriage has become legal in a number of states. We should be rightfully worried, lest the high court open the door to legalizing same-sex marriage throughout the country, a move that will accelerate the movement for same-sex marriage around the world. To do so is to engage in massive social experimentation and restructuring, with little thought about the effect of these decisions on present and future generations.

It turns out that Mother's Day and Father's Day are more than gifts, greeting cards and gatherings. These observances remind us to recommit ourselves to the vocation of marriage and family. May we the family of the Knights of Columbus, remain at the forefront in defending and promoting this beautiful and challenging vocation.

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