

## **The Importance of Fatherhood, God's and Man's**

On almost every matter in our lives, there is a tug and pull. For some reason we like to drift toward extremes and settle down in a comfortable chair at one pole or the other. But that's not where meaningful life is found. It is not where we find truth or justice or virtue or anything else. The values our world needs are found in the middle, in wisdom, balance, in "both-and" instead of "either-or."

Some of the most out-of-balance realities in today's world are related to gender. Thoughtful feminism has always recognized that women's liberation is tied to men's liberation. Just as slavery is not rectified by making slaves masters and masters slaves, so gender inequality is not addressed by placing one gender over the other. The strength of relationships, families, and institutions is promoted by the full and healthy actualization of each member. Each person must understand who he/she is, both strengths and weaknesses, natural temperament and talents. The Church correctly teaches that relationships must be understood in terms of complementarity instead of in rivalry. Your gifts can serve me, and mine can serve you, and neither you nor I can pretend to give a gift to another if we don't possess it naturally.

Because it is Father's Day, I will focus on manhood and fatherhood. The manhood and fatherhood and patriarchy that some feminists attack are neither manhood, fatherhood, nor patriarchy. The feminist critique is often an accurate one because its object is a distortion and not authentic manhood or fatherhood.

If we imagine God the Father as an absentee, demanding, abusive being with unreasonable expectations of his human children, we will not be comfortable making the sign of the cross or saying "Father." If we imagine God as a smothering, controlling, overprotective mother who cannot let go of her children, we will not have a proper understanding of either human or divine maternity. Each and every assertion human beings make about God is faulty. That is why mystical theologians employ what is called "negative theology" in assertions about God—i.e., God is good and not-good. This mind-teaser simply means that no "goodness" we have ever experienced can express God's goodness.

Nevertheless, metaphors and analogies are employed to "suggest" the mysteries of God. Fatherhood is an apt metaphor for God because it suggests the initiatory as opposed to the receptive origin of life. Also, in relationship to life and creation, fatherhood suggests a physical "separateness" from the child whereas motherhood involves profound attachment. Applied to God, fatherhood describes God's free initiative in choosing to create; the Judaeo-Christian God is not "seduced" to create as pagan gods were. Also, God's fatherhood expresses God's transcendence, that is, God's "otherness." God is creator, God maintains everything that exists and is close to it, but God is not "in" creation as pantheists believe.

Fatherhood, divine or human, is not an evil concept. Healthy fathering is vital to good marriages, nurturing families, and knowing our God.

*Father Keith*