

Homily12Ord.A
June 21, 2020
St Bernard Church
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I'd like to talk this morning about the connection between fatherhood and communion. Not just Holy Communion, but the importance of communion in the Church, in society and in the family.

Communion, the principle of being united with another person or persons, is the key to understanding the Trinity. The love between God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit is so real, so intense, so profound, that they are in essence one person.

The Church is also a communion of persons. As Saint Paul says in 1st Corinthians, the Church has many parts, but we are all one body. As Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Ephesians, we are one body, one Spirit, called to one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, with one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Our unity is most beautifully and powerfully experienced in the Eucharist, in which the faithful become one with and in the person of Jesus Christ.

In marriage, a man and woman become one. They become a communion of persons. As it says in Genesis about Adam and Eve, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body."

There's a tension in our modern world between the principle of communion and the principle of individualism.

Individualism is the principle of being independent and self-reliant.

Individualism has increasingly become a dominant characteristic of our contemporary culture. Since the 1960's, we have focused more and more on individual rights and individual freedoms and less on our responsibility for the common good.

Some of the negative consequences of the rise in individualism are the sense of division and alienation between people, less agreement on what should be shared values and a dramatic increase in loneliness.

One commentator, Robert Bellah, author of *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*, describes the current situation as follows:

- Just when we are in many ways moving to an ever greater validation of the importance of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing.

As our society has become more individualistic, the institutions of the Church and marriage have both suffered. We know that the number of Americans who are affiliated with churches has decreased significantly. The marriage rate has also declined, as has the birth rate.

How can Christian fathers make a positive contribution to the communion of persons that are meant to exist in the Church and in our families? I want to focus on two responses to that question.

First, the foundation of fatherhood is the unity of the husband and wife in marriage and the commitment of the husband to sacrifice himself for his wife as Jesus sacrificed Himself for the Church. As Saint Paul instructed in Ephesians 5:

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, ... that she might be holy and without blemish. So... husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

How does this work? The physical expression of the unity of the husband and wife, of their commitment to sacrifice for each other, is designed by God to result in the generation of children. The love of the husband and wife for each other overflows into new life.

It's an amazing miracle that the communication of a married couple's love for one another leads to the creation of sons and daughters who reflect the image of their parents and will live for eternity.

As Christian fathers, then, our primary task is to be committed to unity with our spouses and with our children. We must do everything we can to get the whole family to heaven. In the Christian family, we all love each other and sacrifice for each other. We are a communion of persons.

It's been said that the greatest thing a father can do for his children is love their mother. So fathers, a question for our reflection this morning is this: “What more can we do to create greater unity with our wives?” All that happens in the home radiates from this unity.

Secondly, Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that Christ is the head of every husband. This means that the authority of a husband and father is derived

from his relationship with and his obedience to Jesus. Every father and husband must be submissive to Jesus. He is our Lord, our boss.

This gives rise to the second question for fathers to reflect on today: “Do my wife and children know that Jesus is my boss, that my decisions for the family all flow from my prayers and my desire to be faithful and obedient to Jesus and His Church?”

Fathers have to resist the temptations in modern life to be self-centered, to focus on our personal agendas, the things we want for ourselves, and what is convenient for us. And we have to do all we can to instill the objective truths of our Catholic faith in our families. Our faith in Jesus should guide everything we do and say. Our faith in Jesus should be what holds our families together.

Each of us is meant to be part of a choir of love, truth and self-sacrifice, a choir that is a communion of many, many persons. To make the beautiful music planned for us by God, fathers must know their part in the choir, and play it well.

I want to close with this passage from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians:

“I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit...and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may...comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”