

Am I my Dad?

A reflection about who we are in terms of the people we love.

19/7/20

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord of power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things:
Graft in our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

*“Teach me your way, O Lord,
and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.*

*I will praise you, O Lord my God,
with all my heart;*

I will glorify your name for ever.

For great is your love towards me;

*you have delivered my soul from
the depths of the grave.”*

(Psalm 86: 11 – 13)

(Alternate readings for Seventh Sunday after Pentacost)

My father died three Sundays ago.

It is indeed a rite of passage for any child when a parent dies, particularly if you are the eldest sibling in the family. My father’s death was not a surprise. He had been a heavy smoker for most of his life and eventually his lungs gave into cancer.

You may be wondering how I am feeling?

Perhaps one of you listening or reading this message has also lost someone dear to you recently or in the past?

To be honest, I have mixed feelings about my father’s death. I am relieved that he is now removed from any physical pain. No one deserves to suffer. However, it needs to be said that in recent years, for various reasons, my father and I were no longer close. We had our issues that we found difficult to resolve and for the sake of peace in my life, I chose to distance myself. I struggled with this decision for many years right up to his death, but it was a choice that I felt that I had to make for the sake of my well being.

Had I, in a sense, forgotten who I was and where I came from?

This is an interesting question.

You see, in order to keep a sane state of mind, by distancing myself emotionally and physically from my father, I had, in a way, distanced myself from myself.

Sound confusing?

Let me try and explain my thoughts to you.

When we have strife in our interpersonal relationships, whatever form they might be, we often tend to focus on the negative aspects of that relationship,

forgetting all of the positive times of formation and growth together. Perhaps this is a natural human trait, as we try to justify our actions and resultant feelings.

I had, unknowingly, forgotten about the strengths of my father and all that he gave me in terms of who I am today.

This revelation actually came about in a strange way.

My father, a generous, giving and friendly person, had always been big into music. He was a talented guitarist and even played in a band as a youngster. His passion for music over the years never died. When it came to packing up his meagre belongings after his death, I stumbled across his pride and joy: his vinyl record collection and a seriously good quality amplifier and record player.

In the midst of packing up his home, I forgot about the records and the hi-fi and went about doing what was necessary. It was only a few days later, back home, that I decided to have a look at his old hi-fi and record collection.

I was amazed. I went through the vast record collection and found albums that I had played as a teenager in the family home. I decided to connect up the old record player, fairly confident that it was beyond repair, and I was astounded to find that it still worked!

I started to listen to music.

My father's music.

Then something strange started to happen.

The more I listened to my father's old music that I had grown up with, the less estranged from my father I now began to feel.

He was my Dad.

He had helped me become the person I am today.

I began to embrace who I was and where I had come from.

For the first time, in years, I felt liberated in accepting me and accepting my Dad, for all faults and mine.

So I asked myself the question.

Am I my Dad?

Yes.

I carry all his hopes and fears inside of me. I am a child of his being. I am who I am because I am in my Dad and he is in me.

This started me really thinking about all of our relationships in life.

We all carry each other in our hearts and minds, whether we realise it, or like it, or not. We are all part of each other in a much deeper way than we will ever know. When we cut ourselves off from one another, and yes, sometimes this is necessary, we still carry that person in our hearts and minds. They are part of who we are. It is exactly the same if someone dies. They have not left us, only their physical body has. They are still with us in spirit and in terms of how they have helped us grow and develop.

Extend this thought for a moment to the idea that Jesus lives in us too.

Even though Jesus is no longer living with us physically, He lives on eternally in our lives through our hearts, minds and actions. In the same way that my Dad's music reminded me so strongly of him, so too does celebrating the Eucharist remind us of Jesus and all He has done for us.

Tielhard de Chardin once wrote, "I am who I am because I am in you."

I read these words for the first time in 1987 in a Systematic Theology 3 class at Rhodes University many years ago. They had a profound impact on me at the time and I have never forgotten them. It has taken the death of my dear father to remind me of the truth and wisdom of these few words. Ponder them for a moment. "I am who I am because I am in you."

We are who we are because we are in each other. We are a community of people, God's people. We live together, we love together, we work together, we cry together, we suffer together and we rejoice together. We were never made to be alone and isolated, physically or emotionally. We are a family.

My thoughts and prayers this morning go out to all the people around the world, including any of you, who have lost loved ones during the global pandemic, for whatever reason. I am with you in spirit and thought. I feel your pain and I feel your suffering. Life is hard. Life is learning how to let go and let God, when we are unable to control what is happening around us. Difficult for some of us, I know.

Know this:

You are loved. You are loved by God more than you will ever understand. Rest in that love. It is yours to claim and to hold close to your heart. It is yours to rest on and take comfort in.

You are a part of those who have loved you and they are part of you. It is ok. Embrace your life, your mistakes, your past and anything that brings you grief. Let it go. You are who you are and Jesus loves you just as you are, and so do we.

We are never complete. We are always growing, learning and developing, as both human beings and Christians. I never thought that the death of my father would bring me so close to him and help me accept myself in a new and liberating way. I wish the same for you. Jesus is already part of who you are. Live Jesus by honouring who you are and what you do. This is how we build the Kingdom of God.

In the wise words of the Psalmist, “

***“Teach me your way, O Lord,
and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.”***

I wish you peace and a restful Sunday.

Every blessing to you and your loved ones.

Fr Darron.