

Homily for July 9, 2020

Thursday 14th week of Ordinary Time

Parenting in three dimensions

The man in the supermarket was pushing a cart which contained, among other things, a screaming baby. As the man proceeded along the aisles, he kept repeating softly, "Keep calm, George. Don't get excited, George. Don't get excited, George. Don't yell, George."

A lady watching with admiration said to the man, "You are certainly to be commended for your patience in trying to quiet little George."

Mam," he declared, "I'm George."

Of all vocations parenting is the one that calls us to love and tests our love like no other. In today's reading from Hosea we have presented to us one of the most beautiful expressions of the father-heart of God. We see portrayed three dimensions of the Father's parental heart and in turn helps us to identify with our heavenly Father in this high and holy calling. We hear of the:

- The Risks of Parenting
- The Pains of Parenting
- The Joys of Parenting

God's parental heart is on full display in the first verses of our text. Did you notice the repeated use of the first person pronoun I?

- I loved him,
- I called my son
- It was I who taught Ephraim to walk
- I took them in my arms
- I led them with cords of human kindness
- I was like those who lift infants to their cheeks.
- I bent down to them and fed them.

Seven expressions of the Father's sacrificial love. This is one of the things about the heart of love. There is always a risk involved. To give yourself to this other who came from your loins in sacrificial love does not mean that as the child grows the love will always be reciprocated. We see this theme repeatedly in Scripture. God pours his love out to his children and often they take it for granted and even worse spurn his love.

I am sure that every parent here has experienced the joy of giving your all to your children but has also in the process experienced the pains of parenting, where the child's heart turns from you.

In our Hosea reading a verse is omitted that I would like to quote:

*The more I called them,
the more they went from me;*

Have any of you known this pain? Children who for reasons you cannot understand turn away from you and from the faith you have instilled within them? This is one of the most difficult consequences of love, it asks such vulnerability of us. To love is to recognize the freedom of the child – as the heavenly Father did with Israel. It requires of persevering patience where we call upon the Lord to extend to our wayward children the compassionate heart of the Father as he declares:

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

There are also the joys of parenting experienced as adult children come to recognize their parents in a way where they learn to reciprocate the love extended to them. In verses 10-11 of Hosea 11 this return is poetically expressed this way:

*They shall go after the LORD,
who roars like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west.
¹¹ They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.¹*

Egypt and Assyria represent Israel's captivity, and our children to the attitudes and values of this present world. The Father's heart is like that of a lion when seeing his little ones in danger, or a mother bear separated from her cubs. He so longs for his children to be freed from worldly bondage and to come to their senses. What joy when his loved ones return to their homes like the Father experiences in the parable of the prodigal son.

For all of you who are parents, may you see in this text words that help to give you the context for your own parenting where with your Father in heaven you experience the risks, pain and joys of parenting, and with George pray:

"Heavenly Father help me to keep calm. not to get excited. Not to yell. Instill in me more of your Father heart."

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ho 11:10–11). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.