

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

In Praise of Our Father and Our Fathers

Our American society has developed an annual Calendar of Celebrations to remind us of our daily blessings lest we forget. God the Father revealed the idea ages ago when He proposed a calendar of special days and weeks and years to remind His people that He never wanted them to become 'ho-hum' about His abundant saving intervention in their history. This calendar of events is posted in the Book of Leviticus.



Come next Sunday, we pause to express gratitude for those fathers of our human families who bear His name and who reflect His love and care for His children. I dedicate this column to all men whose lives mirror the Fatherhood of God.

In the American cycle of celebration, mothers were honored long before we had a Father's Day. Yet it was a thoughtful American father who first proposed the idea of a special day to honor American mothers. We bless the memory of Dr. Frank Hering, the first football coach at Notre Dame University, for his generous nod to Mother which led to the 1914 proclamation by President Woodrow Wilson of an annual day in May to give public thanks to our mothers.

But now, come June, we give Dad his day in the sun. And we pause to give thanks to our common Father and to all earthly fathers who reflect His love in their care for their families.

Dear old Dad has often been maligned while mother has been deluged with praise in prose and poetry. The only verse about father that I can recall wasn't exactly complimentary:

"Everybody works but father
And he sits 'round all day."

And the media have often portrayed him as the all-American incompetent. "Life with Father" and "Cheaper by the Dozen" had the whole family taking potshots at dad, who was

a sort of composite of good guy and buffoon. Dagwood Bumstead is tolerated lovingly by the family, including the dogs who seem to surpass him in intelligence.

While some fathers may operate in this image, there are many who take their role seriously. We focus our praise on them today and, at the same time, pray for a sense of vocation for the irresponsible fathers who have sought escape from their duties.

It takes a life of study and dedication to become a worthy father. There are no courses that I have ever heard of to prepare a man for the position, nor any intuitive knowledge to serve as a sure guide to success. And it requires a constant sacrifice of personal convenience to be the father of a family. There are no vacations from the job, nor shifting of responsibilities to Mother. No one can replace him in his 24-hour per day assignment.

We have no special Mass for Father's Day nor do we have one for Mother's Day. Yet this Sunday the readings assigned for the eleventh Sunday of the year have much to say about God, our Father, in whose image, our earthly fathers are called to pattern their paternity.

The first reading from Exodus shows the care of a watchful Father leading His family out of Egypt and the passage assures us that we, His family, are dear to Him and are regarded as His special possession.

St. Paul in the second reading assures us that God's proof of His fatherly love is His readiness to forgive, that His love does not die even when His children turn from Him.

And the Gospel of St. Matthew assures us that our Heavenly Father would never leave us uncared for. Jesus spent His whole life telling us about His Father and calling us to learn more about His Father's love.

The Gospels are filled with the words of Jesus about His Father. These are the qualities that should be reflected in the lives of those who bear His name on earth:

1. The Father is a giver, willing to share everything that is important to

Him. He shares the gift of life and even gave us His only Son as His special gift to us.

2. The Father is a lover. Jesus preached a great deal about the fact that His Father was not one who approached His people as an oppressive ruler, but rather He sought His people out to give Himself to them in tenderness. To prove his love even more clearly, He constantly offered His forgiveness even before His children asked for it.

3. The Father is firm because He is faithful and never gives up on those He loves. He is firm with all who deny His love by refusing to love His children. For all who refuse to love, indeed deny God's presence in the world.

When Philip asked to see the Father, Jesus replied: "Whoever sees me, sees the Father." Earthly fathers have no easy task in their vocation to that same mission that Jesus had — to reveal the Father's love.

A modern approach to the religious education of our young people is found in a series of texts called Come to the Father. It is designed to unfold gradually to the minds and hearts of children the love that God the Father has for them personally. This teaching mission is rendered almost impossible if a child has not experienced the warmth and care of an earthly father. Unfortunately, there are too many of our children who have no such image to bring them to an understanding of the love of a Heavenly Father.

I thank God for the blessings of my earthly father. Vivid are my memories of his hands calloused by labor to give us our daily bread — of hands folded in daily prayer to the Father from whom all blessings flow. Vivid are my memories of his tears in days of the Depression when he worried about the family entrusted to his care. I am grateful for his firm discipline, for the strong hand that tamed the animal that tried to be me. Such is a father's love that mirrored for me the love of a Heavenly Father. I thank God today and always for that love and for all fathers who manifest a similar sense of vocation.

Press Peace Overtures, Pope Urges President

Rome [RNS] — President Gerald Ford, winding up his European tour with a visit June 3 to Pope Paul, was told by the pontiff during a wide-ranging discussion that military might is never the final answer to world problems and he was urged to continue overtures for peace in the world's troublespots, particularly the Mideast.

The Pope stressed, during an hour-long private audience with Mr. Ford, the "moral consideration" of justice in all political and economic dealings involving the U.S. and other world powers, large or small.

President Ford reportedly assured the Pope that the U.S., while pledged to honor its commitments, would make every effort to seek and implement peaceful and just solutions to the crisis situations now in evidence.

Although specifics of the conversation between Pope Paul and President Ford were not disclosed immediately, sources at the Vatican said the Pope had planned to discuss such pressing world topics as the future of Southeast Asia, particularly "humanitarian" aspects of aid to Vietnamese refugees, U.S. food aid to the world's hungry, and other questions.

It was also disclosed that the Pope had sought to bring up the Middle East situation and his call for the internationalization of the holy places in Jerusalem.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had indicated prior to the Pope's meeting with Mr. Ford that the President would "enlist

the Pope's guidance" on several matters. Among these, he added, would be the Arab-Israeli question and food and refugee problems throughout the world.

The last meeting between a U.S. President and Pope Paul was a Sept. 28, 1970 visit by former President Richard Nixon.

Annulment Easier Than New Divorce?

Rome [RNS] — Despite the introduction of civil divorce in Italy, the majority of Italian couples wishing to separate are seeking annulment of their marriages through Catholic Church tribunals — because annulments are easier and quicker to obtain.

According to an Italian Radio report, a Church annulment requires only a few months to obtain while a civil divorce must be preceded by a five-year period of separation demanded by civil law.

In addition, there is no question of paying alimony following an annulment.

The broadcast said that the number of annulment applications in Italy has increased substantially since the divorce law was passed in 1970 and upheld in 1974 when a referendum to overturn the law failed.

There is growing speculation that annulments may become even easier to obtain in the future because of the revised code of canon law, expected to be released later this year. The revised code is expected to permit greater latitude in allowing such conditions as mental instability or homosexuality of one partner to serve as grounds for annulment, the broadcast said.



President Ford, Pope, Mrs. Ford exchange gifts. (RNS)