

This weekend we recognize our dads, and we have this special chance to give thanks to God for them and to tell them how much they mean to us. We could even *show* how much they mean to us. It doesn't take a lot. You could get a greeting card...with a gift certificate or just some plain old cash – that would be fine. A gift of some sort, nothing much – preferably something electronic, maybe something we can swing or shoot – it's all good. Or just keep it simple: a quiet lunch or dinner at home: pizza, beverages, steak, mother's homemade lasagna recipe, because there's nothing better than... my wife's homemade lasagna recipe. Right, I'll be fine with that card. Or you could just say Happy Father's Day. Or, look at me.

When that special day comes around, whether it's a birthday, anniversary, Christmas, Mothers' or Fathers' Day, we might not say it out loud, but we have certain expectations. We hope that someone will take special notice of us and recognize us. How many times have you said, “*Oh, you don't have to get anything for me,*” when inside you were thinking, “*I hope you get something for me.*” And then there have been those times when they don't remember. You try to convince yourself that it doesn't really matter, but ‘*How could they forget?*’ You're disappointed, because when it comes down to it, *you* wouldn't forget their special day, now would you?

Oh, but we do. Too often the people we truly care about are the ones we take for granted. We don't always treat them in a way that says, “*Hey, I do love you.*” But when we commit those offenses, we apologize and ask forgiveness, and we say, “*I want to do better next time, because I love you.*” You'd never say, “*I know how much you love me anyway, so it doesn't matter if I give you anything at all. In fact I probably won't.*” You'd never say that to someone you love, not to your father or mother, not to your children or grandchildren, not to your friends.

And you especially wouldn't say that to your heavenly Father, not after the way he has loved you more than anyone else ever could! Not after the way he sent his Son to die on the cross for you, to make you a part of his kingdom and family! God deserves much more than that. What kind of people would ignore their Father after all he's done, shamelessly and deliberately rejecting him, so they could wallow in the filth of their own sinful choices?

People like the Corinthians, I guess. The Apostle Paul wrote to them, “***9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.***” Apparently after Paul had left them, things really went downhill. They began to regress to their former way of life, to conform to the standard of the people living around them rather than to God's standards.

When Paul wrote to them, he wasn't saying, “*Oh, just look at all those wicked people out there, outside the church.*” He was saying, “*Hey, folks, just look right here inside and among your own brothers and sisters. This isn't the way God's children live.*” When they read the laundry list that Paul wrote, no one was wondering, “*What is he talking about? He can't be referring to us!*” But he was referring to them, and they knew it.

Within the context of chapter six, Paul addresses two main issues: lawsuits and sexual immorality. Some were taking their fellow believers to court, as Paul said, treating each other like unbelievers. Rather than forego their rights and, in so doing, honor God, they wanted to honor themselves. They were cheating, swindling and slandering each other. They were giving their hearts to greed and the love of money, forgetting about the undeserved love of their Father. Simply put, they were guilty of idolatry. Money became their god.

For others the Lord's gift of sex became their god. Keep in mind these people were recognized as members of that Christian church down the street in Corinth. Corinth was a city where people tolerated and accepted just about any lifestyle or practice, especially when it came to indulging one's physical lusts. Many of their pagan temples offered men, women and even children to satisfy their clientele's baser desires. (‘*Why not call it worship?*’ they thought.) Walking the streets of Corinth, you'd be certain that the world was coming to an end soon. And when a male member of the church and his step-mother announced their relationship, no one said anything. In fact, fellow church goers were even congratulating him on his ‘manly conquest.’

You wonder, *'What were these people thinking?'* But for Paul, it wasn't so much the shock of it all, but the sadness. The disappointment in the all-out, unrepentant back-sliding of these people he considered his dear brothers and sister in Christ – it must have been incredibly sickening. What do you do – cut your losses and move on?

These people were horrible. They were selfish and greedy. They burned with lust and indulged in sexual immorality with little to no concern for anyone else – least of all, God their Father. If my children treated me with such contempt and disregard, like they wanted no part of me, then I'd feel compelled to make some major adjustments to my will and their inheritance, alright. That's what Paul tells them (twice) in these few verses, ***"<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?"*** Do you really want to give up the greatest treasure of God's kingdom in exchange for a cheap, hopeless existence on your own?

That's not much of a choice. You and I know it, and we shake our heads in amazement and disappointment at those who don't know or seem to care. You see that life with God means a life of peace and strength, that he is watching over you and caring for you as our Father. *"Father, since you're living with us and you're so powerful and loving, the peace and strength are great, but do you think you could spare a little more financial peace and strength?"* *"Faith, hope and love – I mean, who isn't thankful for those spiritual gifts, but Father, I could put those gifts to even better use if you allowed me some noticeable relief from all the stresses and concerns you've put in my life."* As God's children who are, for the most part, relatively obedient and respectful, that's not too much to ask, is it? We're not perfect, but no one would think of us as thieves or sexual perverts.

When the question is raised, *'who gets to inherit God's kingdom?'* there's a part of you that wants to jump up and wave your hand in the air, *"I do! I do! I get to inherit God's kingdom!"* And why? [*"Because I'm a believer!"*] Ah yes, spoken like a true child.

On the one hand, it is true that only believers will inherit God's kingdom, even those believers who struggle with their faith and continue to fall into sin and temptation over and over again. The key difference between a believer and the garden variety thief or sexual pervert is not that one is less guilty before God than the other. The key difference is that the believer admits his guilt and then, in faith, looks to the cross trusting in Jesus' perfect life and death as the ransom for all his sins. The believer sees the true horror and abomination of her lustful or greedy thoughts, words and actions and how offensive they are to a holy God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Believers flee and run away from those sins, knowing how quickly and easily the flesh can be tempted and trapped, and knowing how deeply and completely their Father has loved them.

You who will inherit the kingdom of God are believers, yes. But you are believers who recognize your sins and are crushed under the weight of your guilt. The ones who make time for confession and see the need to repent throughout the day are also the ones who see even more clearly the love of Christ. That's why the Lord pardoned and restored King Manasseh, who was brought to his knees literally and fell on the mercy of God. That's why the woman in our gospel lesson generously anointed Jesus' feet with her perfume and her tears, and she left her life of sin. These believers were sinners who came to know God's love and how much they had truly been forgiven.

As for the Corinthians, Paul did not cut his losses and move on. He stuck with them, he prayed for them, he wrote to them, warning them directly and encouraging them with the love of Christ and God's wisdom. *"Yes, you were foul, rotten sinners, just as I was..."<sup>11</sup> ...***But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***"*

You also are the kind of people who will inherit the kingdom of God. Not because of you or anything you have done, but because of God who has cleansed you from your sins through Baptism; who has made you holy and set you apart as his own through the blood Christ, and who has made you righteous and innocent by his grace alone. He has called you to repentance and faith in the name of Jesus, and because of that saving work of God you are the ones who will inherit the kingdom of our God and Father.

With repentant hearts, lay your sins before your Father with confidence in His Son. Do it often, and expect even greater depths of joy and strength as his Spirit draws you closer to Him through the word and sacrament. Go to your Father in prayer, asking him for a life of willing and faithful service in his kingdom, thankful for the love and forgiveness he has always shown. On this Fathers' Day, we can truly be thankful and recognize the gift of fathers and especially of our heavenly Father. To him be the glory now and forever. Amen.