

The Journey of Sonship and Fatherhood

Identity in sonship vital for men

The identity of a man is found most incisively in the figure of Jesus Christ. He stands as the one who all men must strive to emulate, even as a father. The qualities of fatherhood are found most perfectly in Christ; yet, He never spoke of himself as a “father.” The Savior understood himself always as “Son”, and it is in this Image that He was able to be fatherlike. Theologically, this is not absolutely the case, but provides a paradigm for us. A father cannot give what he does not have. If a man can confirm in himself the identity of a son, then he can impart it confidently.

As I have seen in my own work of full-time men’s ministry, men struggle with their identity as an acceptable and beloved “son” of their own fathers—and therefore they oftentimes fall short in imparting that sense of being loved to their children. Also, this lack of identity in sonship stifles the ability of fathers to raise their young with confidence and reassurance. Strong identity in sonship must be restored in Christian men, so they can be the fathers God ordained them to be. By probing into the traits of sonship that Our Lord manifested, this enables a man to move forward in life with confident masculine identity—empowering him to be the son and father he his called to be. Let just a few points be detailed here to illustrate the valuable witness of the relationship of the first two Divine Persons.

To make things simple, I will introduce first, in brief, that ours is to reflect the relationship of the Father and Son

- by remaining in constant communication with the Father, permitting Him to communicate Himself to us
- by carrying out the will of the Father, following His commandments and the mission He gives us
- by glorifying the Father in our mission and all our deeds, allowing His glory first to operate within us

Remaining in communication with the Father

While Our Lord walked this earth He was always in communion with His Heavenly Father. Not a simply awareness of presence, but a fullness of vision. This is a certitude of the Catholic faith. While we will not get this fullness of vision on earth, nonetheless, ours is to strive for an open communion—as ongoing as we can get it. The connection between the Father and the Son was one of perfect communion wherein their knowledge of each other was intimate. “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (*Mt 11:27*). Each knew the other thoroughly; this is the ideal for every father and son.

For us, the secret to this communion with the Heavenly Father is to commence dialogue with him as a son. It is we who have to take the initiative. The Father is doing His part, we need only to dispose ourselves to receive him; and this we must do in the quiet of our hearts. “But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (*Mt 6:6-8*). Each man is only to engage in this trek of personal conversation with the Heavenly Father, and talk to him as a son. The invitation is clear. It is not your needs or amount of words which secures communion, just your openness to receiving Him and getting to know Him. This will reassure that all your needs will be met as a son.

Working to do the will of the Father

Fathoming Christ’s entire life as oriented toward accomplishing the tasks and mission of His Father’s will is an integral part of what it is to be called to divine sonship. The journey of communion with the Father is to not only know Him, but to do what he commands. In this way one can find that peace and happiness he desires. “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (*Jn 15:9-11*). No question, our completeness as sons is accomplished when we realize the summons of our fathers—that one in heaven as well as earth.

There is no question that what the Heavenly Father requires is oftentimes difficult; yet, it is upon our shoulders to have faith that the Father is with us—that He will guide us and strengthen us in the mission He hands out. This was the test of His only begotten Son on the journey to Calvary. The test of the Christian man is to face the greatest hardships, even unto death, in obedience to the Father. “So Jesus said, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him’” (*Jn 8:28-29*). What is fearsome to all men is to put that trust in God the Father that He will assist us in even the worst of trials. The cross gives us that example to follow; it is the image of the strength. And when we accept it, the Father is pleased.

Always working for the glory of the Father

Also, when walking with God, we should do so not for our own sakes, but for the sake of the Father. It is the mission of the Heavenly Father that we are to carry out. It is His itinerary we are called to sustain—all for His glory. Spiritually, every man desires to culminate his life in honor of his father; thus those words of Jesus resound: “I have glorified thee on earth; having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do” (*Jn 17:4*). Every man realizes there is something beyond himself that he is to accomplish. Whatever the mission, it is the Father who bestows it, and it is He who is exalted when it is completed.

Nonetheless, this glory, realized for the sake of the Father, was accomplished not simply in view of the work carried out by the Son, but by the Father’s own work in the Son. The glory of the Father was manifest in the Son, certainly in all His deeds, but especially in what the Father engendered in the Son. The impartation of glory was bestowed upon the Son to make the ultimate sacrifice, and in so doing, return the glory to His Father. “Before His death, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee,..’” (*Jn 17:1*). My brothers, you are called to glorify your Heavenly Father in all your words, in all your thoughts, and in all your actions—in your particular mission. But as with the Son, this glory will be brought out foremost through the Father’s work in you. To the Father is the credit of glory given. “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me...” (*Jn 8:54*).

Final words of pleasure from the Father

Gentlemen, our happiness is found in this association with the Heavenly Father which gives us peace, mission, and identity—the paradigm of our lives as men and fathers. We feel deep within that approval is needed for us to move forward, to live with strength, and to make straight our path. As with Christ, in our journey with the Father, need to hear the words he received which every man yearns to hear: “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased” (*Mk 1:11*). Heavenly Father, please now speak, your sons are listening.

- Fr. Phillip Chavez SOLT