

June 3, 2018

Happy Father's Day!

As Father's Day approaches June 17, I find myself recalling how my dad taught me to respect those of all ages, all nationalities, all idiosyncrasies, even all species.

Dad loves animals. Every morning prior to moving to an assisted living center, he would pour bird seed into the back-yard bird feeder. The birds never compensated Dad for the cost of the seed, and since Dad doesn't speak bird (that particular dialect, anyway), he never knew if they even said "thanks." But Dad never complained.

I, on the other hand, did complain. I'm not as practiced at Christian charity as my dad.

"Can't you say 'thank you,' maybe send a card? *Something?*" I'd ask them. They'd just give me the bird and go on eating. The seeds would fly this way and that as the birds pecked away like a slew of little tornados. Meanwhile, a squirrel named Mrs. Jones and a few of her children would sit on the ground being showered with tasty tidbits. One squirrel wore a tiny catcher's mitt.

Soon Dad would let their toy poodle Missy out the back door, and she'd dart toward the squirrels like a U.S. Marine. Mrs. Jones would yawn, toss a nut into her mouth, then dart away in a blur. Missy would bark a doggy curse, and the squirrel would give Missy the claw. Funny, I never recall Marlin Perkins ever discussing just how rude wildlife could be.

To be honest, I think it was mostly for show. Dad once spotted Missy and Mrs. Jones dancing together under the full moon.

Dad loves immigrants. I don't say this lightly. In fact, I say it quite heavily. When it comes to refugees and immigrants, one can clearly see Dad putting the love of Christ into action.

In the 1970s, Mom and Dad began sponsoring African refugees after Dad had spent time working in the Sudan. For more than a decade, my folks welcomed them into our home where they stayed until they got on their feet.

There was Aaron, who, when he ate, sounded like a platoon of soldiers walking through a swamp. There was Ahmed, whose voice would become really high-pitched when he became angry, like when he was losing at Monopoly. His voice would steadily rise from, say, Tina Turner, to Big Bird, to an angry Mickey Mouse. Finally, his voice would get so high that only dogs could hear him.

And there was Isaac, the only one that I recall for certain was Muslim. Always quick to smile and ready for a laugh, he told us of the time when he was acting as a server at a swank outdoor dinner party back in Khartoum. He snuck a few too many drinks and fell into the swimming pool with a tray full of appetizers. Yep. *Not the way you typically visualize a Muslim, eh?*

That was my awesome upbringing.

Through Mom and Dad's generosity in offering their home to others, I learned that despite color, despite religion, people were people. And that's why I tend to be protective of immigrants today. *People are people.*

Dad embraces misfits. Some lessons come not with specific words or actions, but through a lifetime of subtle examples.

Like many of you, I really do feel set apart often times. Like I've stepped off the path somewhere and never quite made it back to the trail.

When I was young, a psychologist told my parents: “Dave is what we in the psychology field term as a ‘weirdo.’ He’s just ... well, *weird*.”

“Oh, good,” Dad responded. “We thought for a moment he was maladjusted.”

Dad has taught me that while the trail most travelled may feel safe, it’s better to create your own path. That’s where the heart resides, after all. And the best way to find your path, Dad has proven, is to listen to our Loving Lord, and then, as Pope Francis says, “be brave.”

Throughout his life, Dad has shown me through his example that life is about warming to *all comers*. They don’t have to be Christian, or American, or white, or straight, or even human. Dad has shown me that there is no one that is not worthy of our goodness (although dogs are slightly more worthy than cats, but please don’t tell my cats I said that).

The only condition? As long as their words and actions provide proof that they have no harmful intent for anyone else, he celebrates people for who they are, warts and all.

Dad taught me the value of humor. Dad is 93. During our nightly phone conversation, when I ask Dad how his day went, he typically responds, “It was so quiet you could hear a mouse fart.”

No further explanation needed.

Dad loves his beloved Jesus. Last but not least (which really goes without saying), through his incredibly patient, even-tempered and humor-filled vantage point, Dad taught me that our God is a happy God, and that He desires nothing more than for His children to share in that happiness. That’s why He sent His son, after all, who brought with Him the instructions on how to be happy on earth.

Through Dad’s example, he taught me that the happy Christ is the Son and the Sun around which we rotate. Through God’s Son-shine, we are shined brightly upon, and thus shine bright upon others, just as Dad does upon all he encounters.

Happy Father’s Day, Dad!