

Spiritual Aspect of Father's Day - Christian Family - Orthodox Notes

Written by OrthodoxNotes

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A conference participant once asked the speaker, “What is the best way for a father to love his children?” The speaker replied, “The best way for a father to love his children is to love their mother.” I reflect often upon that superbly accurate statement. And I think the reverse is equally true: the best way a mother can love her children is to love their father.

More than anything else in the world, children need a loving family and parents who support each other, even if the parents are apart through separation or divorce.

Christ challenges us to love one another, and that challenge becomes even more compelling within our own families. Even in the best of families, there is brokenness. And that is why the man’s call to fatherhood is so important. We fathers are called to show our families strong, manly love and forgiveness, virtues modeled powerfully in the father of the prodigal son (Lk 11:32).

This father is stable, loving, and generous. In his fairness, he avoids violating the freedom of either of his sons. When the prodigal demands his inheritance and decides to leave, the father does not attempt to withhold the money. He does not pressure the son to stay by trying to make him feel guilty. And the father is wise enough not to send care packages to relieve the son’s distress. The father allows both of his adult sons to make their own mistakes and to learn from their failures, an appropriate form of discipline for older adolescents and young adults.

The prodigal’s father demonstrates manly leadership by taking loving initiatives, and he takes many such initiatives. He maintains a thriving business to provide the generous inheritance. He creates and supports a loving family for the prodigal to run from and for the older son to remain with. And there is his last generous, joyful initiative as he runs out to embrace the returning son, kiss him, and put on him the best robe, ring, and shoes. He celebrates the return of his son with a feast. And in a scene all of us fathers can recognize, he opens up the conversation with the

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sulking older son.

The father takes the initiative in bringing about forgiveness and reconciliation in the whole family. He is a model for us in responding to our call to follow the Spirit of Jesus in taking many initiatives in our families, especially that of boundless forgiveness for our children.

When a father takes responsibility for his own spiritual life, for the way he prays, goes to church, and practices virtue in the family, he gives a good example. Then, his leadership in the family is authentic, based on his own solid relationship with God, and he is less likely to be concerned about any resistance his children may give him. He can lead family prayer. When I suggest that we stand in the living room and pray before a trip or that we pray in a restaurant, I often feel an initial resistance in my children.

But quiet cooperation and peacefulness soon follow. Sometimes the children will even tell me that they prayed in a restaurant when I wasn't there.

At times the father's role of leading the family to great forgiveness and prayerfulness is an unpopular one. But as a man grows in his own spiritual life, he becomes more sturdy and willing to accept responsibility. Although all this is impossible for us fathers to do alone, God can do all things. God can even bestow the awesome spiritual power of fatherhood upon us.

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