

Fathers Help Us Find our Vocations & How to Become Saints

Like most all of us, my earliest memories are of growing up in a loving home with two very dedicated parents.

Mom and Dad were married in 1976; I came along in 1977. We moved into a 3-bedroom home in North Minneapolis, and mom and dad worked hard to turn the house into a home. And it was a home filled with some great memories.

It was here that I learned to pray. Dad would pray with me each night before bed.

And it was here that I also learned about the value of hard work. Both mom and dad worked hard around the house; and dad would work full time doing maintenance for the schools, and then often do things for his parents and his in-laws too.

But above all else, what I learned there and when we moved in the late 80s to suburbia was about who I am as a person, and how to find myself and the path that I needed to go down.

For one, what I learned was love. Dad was (still is) a hard worker. But he wasn't one to disappear in front of the TV after a long day. Typically he'd help mom with some things, and after dinner we'd go to the park and throw the ball around, or go sledding in the winter, or play some games together, firing up the Atari or electric football in the basement. As I got older, together we'd go and help my grandparents with things like lawn cutting and snow shoveling. No matter how busy he was, you'd never know it, because he always had time for me and the people in his life. Indeed in many ways he lived out daily Jesus' commandment to wash the feet of one another through all his actions.

What I've also learned is dedication. When we want something in life, or feel called to something, to borrow from Ringo Starr, it don't come easy. As my moral theology professor told us, when we said "yes" to priesthood, we also said yes to all that went with that - the studying, the prayer, the papers, the helping in a parish, the growing as a person. The same is true for parenting. Dad when he became a dad was dedicated to it. He was there day in and day out to work hard, and do so much for me and our family. Never has he been "too busy" or needed time away. Rather he's always been with the people he loves and done so much for them.

In addition, what I've learned is through the "quiet way" much like Saint Joseph, how one lives out their faith. Dad would pray with me, but he'd also pray additional prayers on his own. He faithfully for instance prays the Liturgy of the Hours, and in our home was a very well-worn Bible he received when he went through RCIA shortly after being married. Dad was never too busy to pray; nor was he never too busy to help you when you needed something.

I've also learned what a difference one person can make for so many people. Over the years, I've got to see dad involved in our parish of Our Lady of Victory where I grew up, and he's been very active as a lector and helping in other ways. I'd also see the dedication he had working in maintenance in the schools he was at to keep them running for the teachers and the students. And most of all, I've seen the dedication he's had to my mom, (and similarly my mom's dedication to him). Coming up on 47 years this fall, they've been there for one another through the highs and lows, but through it all have made one another better.

Dad's also taught me patience. I'm always amazed at how parents deal with kids as they grow. I know I look back on my life and there are a number of moments I'd love to re-visit my younger self and say "hey buddy, think about this!" I don't have a story of "going off the deep end" or anything like that, but like most all of us, I wish I would have done some things differently as I wasn't thinking too clearly or about the future or what would really make me happy at the time. Dad never tried to force anything on me; rather he'd simply offer guidance and support, but knew I had to find my own way in life, which eventually led me to being ordained in 2007 and figuring out what God wanted me to do with my life.

In a nutshell, through what he's done for me, my dad has shown me what I need to do to become a saint. It's something I'm still working at, as is he, as are we all. But while I've learned a lot in seminary about theology, I've seen what I've learned in practice through the life of my dad.

Last summer was a bit scary - as I've shared some exams found my dad needed a triple bypass. It wasn't easy, but now he's feeling great, and it's a joy to see him be active and spending a lot of time with his nephew. Sometimes when I look at the two of them together, I think for a moment that it's 1983 all over again. I do try to make it 1983 often in my car based on my music choices, and I watch Bob Barker's Price is Right every morning while huffing and puffing on an elliptical machine, but I know full well I can't go back. But that's OK. Because I'm going forward, knowing who I am, and who I am called to be, largely in part because of my dad.

I'm guessing you have a similar story about your dad too. They truly show us so much about life and where we are to go. Like Saint Joseph, patron of fathers, they often do this in a quiet way. But because of our fathers, we know so much about what really matters, and can see God and how to get to heaven a bit more clearly.

A very happy Father's Day to all of our dads - and thank you so much for your vocation. Never forget the impact you have on your children and grandchildren. And for those of us who have lost a father, also never forget they continue to watch over you and pray for you on your journey, cheering you on to the finish line every day. What a blessing are our fathers.

God bless and have a great week,

Fr. Paul