

Column062120

Companions on the Journey

June 21, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ

I don't remember when I learned this, but I was definitely an adult at the time. I am the third of four children. My sister, Barbara, who died last November, and my older brother, Michael, were born in 1941 and 1943 respectively. My dad was in the Navy at that time and so was at sea when each was born and then baptized. I was the first of his children that he was present for their baptism. I, of course, remember nothing from that day because I was about two weeks old. But what my father told me many years later was that after my baptism, at Saint David parish in Willow grove, he took me in his arms and he placed me on the main altar of the church. This was 1947.

Who does this? Well, my father did. He wanted the Lord to know that he was grateful for the gift of another child and that this child was being entrusted into his care while he lived but that I was not somehow his possession. I was from God and my life belonged to God. That was what it meant to him when he placed me on the altar. He did not think that doing this meant that I was supposed to be a priest. But that he believed he was moved, prompted to do this—yes, he really believed that. And in me, without any personal memory let alone personal experience, something transpired in that moment between father and son which has made all the difference in my life. That is what I believe.

My dad had a couple of dreams that he said supplied all of the incentive he needed to work hard. He wanted his own home where he could have and raise his family. Every once in a while he wanted to be able to have a late model car. He wanted to have a house that had a garage and he wanted to have a bungalow at the Jersey shore. He lived long enough to see those dreams realized and to have the family business handed from father to son to grandson.

I was blessed by God to have the father and mother that I had. One of the things that my dad gave to me was not just the gift of his Catholic faith. He had a lot of questions as a young man and was very fortunate to have had teachers who took the time to answer his questions, especially about the faith. As a result, when I came along with my own questions of all kinds he was able to help me to understand. That is part of the heritage he gave to me and I am forever thankful because on so many occasions I have been able to help people to comprehend the ways of the Lord or the whys and wherefores of the Church precisely because of my dad. He not only understood but was also able to articulate his faith clearly and to explain it in a manner that makes sense to people. I have tried to pattern the way I live out my priesthood by imitating his approach.

Jesus once said to his apostle Philip: "Philip, he who sees me sees the Father." I once had a friend of mine who knew me well but who had never met my parents say to me after meeting my dad, "It's as if I have known him all my life." Maybe there is more to this father thing than first meets the eye. Dads, do not be afraid to pass on to your children those good ways and those dreams that make you who you are. Do not be afraid to stand up for your Catholic faith. Your sons and daughters need you. And your spouse can use the support. And, of course, Happy Father's Day!

Peace,

Monsignor McHenry