



## THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

### Father Alan's Blog For the Third Sunday After Trinity - June 20, 2021

*"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

St. Luke 15:10 (NIV)

A little boy was watching his father the priest write a sermon and asked him:

*"How do you know what to say Daddy?"*

His father replied:

*"Why, God tells me."*

*"Oh..."*

said the little boy,

*"... then why do you keep crossing things out?"*



Often something magical occurs in the exchanges between fathers and

sons. For example, ever since they could talk, my own sons have never ceased to amaze me with the things they come up with. And who'd have ever thought it? But as I grew older, my own Father got a whole lot wiser. (Because when I was a teenager, my Dad seemed to know extraordinarily little.)

Now, my Heavenly Father – well, He is something else again. For He cares about me every moment of my life. He always has, even before I was born. As the Psalmist attests (139:13b), God ever-so-lovingly:

*“...knit me together in my mother’s womb.”*

As a little boy I absolutely loved the fact that God loved **me** and I remember looking so forward to learning more about Him every week in Sunday school. As a teenager and young adult, though, I spent way too much of my time ignoring my Heavenly Father's voice in my life, and, unfortunately (and as a direct result), I paid a rather high price for those frequent “transgressions,” with lots of, shall we say, “skinned knees.” But now, as an adult, **sometimes** I can hear Him as clear as a bell. Usually, however, it's still a struggle for me to discern my Heavenly Father's will for me and for my life. So, I have to work at keeping the lines of communication open **daily** – through worship and prayer, and by reading His Holy Word, and by talking to others who belong to Him (for my Heavenly Father often works through His people).

But just because there are times when I can't hear Him **clearly**, it doesn't mean that God has abandoned me. No, quite the contrary, in fact. It usually means that I've walked away from **Him** in some way or another. For God has always been there. And He will **always** be there – for **ALL** His children.

And isn't that the mark of a good Father: **being there**? As I've said many times before, earthly fathers won't be remembered so much for:

- † Telling corny jokes;
- † Or embarrassing their kids in front of their friends;
- † Or turning off lights that have been left on;
- † Or turning down the heat and asking everyone to put on a sweater.

Fathers won't really be remembered for:

- † Wearing the loud neckties that they got as gifts;
- † Or sporting black socks - with shorts AND sandals - on those hot summer days;
- † Or burning the hot dogs (or the steak, or the chicken, or the ribs, or the pork chops, etc.) on the barbecue;
- † Or never being in photographs because *they were the ones holding the camera*.

No - fathers will be truly remembered for: **just being there**.

In fact, the best thing a father can do for his children is to **love and cherish their mother** - truly, and constantly, and demonstrably:

*"...for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health..."*

and to "be there" for his family.

And not just physically present either, but emotionally and spiritually present, as well. It's tough enough on a family when Dad, for whatever reason, isn't there. But it's **really** difficult for (and especially damaging on) a family when Dad IS there in body, but absent in mind and in spirit. In cases such as these, family members may be able to **see** Dad, but they also know that they won't get any love (or affection, or contact, or parenting) from him. Like I said, fathers will best be remembered for just being there.



Take, for example, the story of Derek Redmond, a young and talented world-class runner from Great Britain, who had previously shattered the British men's 400-metre record at the age of 19, but was forced to pull out of the men's 400-metre relay at the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul South Korea due to an injury to his Achilles tendon – **a mere ten minutes before the race was scheduled to start**. Derek subsequently underwent five painful surgeries over the next year alone and three more in the years leading up to the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympics. So, when the 1992 Games finally arrived, this was his time his moment – his stage – to show the world how good he was and who he was. Hence, Derek was more determined than ever to win an Olympic medal. The colour of the medal was meaningless to Derek; he just wanted to win one. **Just one**. Derek's father, Jim, had accompanied him to Barcelona (just as he did for all world competitions). They were as close as a father and son could be. Inseparable, really. The best of friends. And when Derek ran, it was as if Jim was running right next to him.

The first heat of the 400-metre relay went great. Derek posted the fastest individual time and his team made it all the way to the semi-finals. Nevertheless, during the semi-final heat, down the backstretch, **a mere 175 metres from the finish line**, Derek suddenly heard a pop in his right hamstring and pulled up lame as if he had been shot. Derek began hopping on one leg, then slowed down and fell to the track. As he lay on the track clutching his right hamstring, a medical personnel unit ran toward him.

At the same time, Jim Redmond, seeing his son in trouble, raced down from the top row of the stands, sidestepping people, bumping into others. Now, Jim had no credentials to be on the track, but all he thought about was getting to his son to help him up.

Meanwhile, on the track, Derek realized that his dream of an Olympic medal was gone. But as the medical crew arrived with a stretcher, he told them with tears running down his face:

***"No there's no way I'm getting on that stretcher. I'm going to finish my race."***

Then Derek lifted himself to his feet, ever so slowly, and started hobbling down the track. Suddenly, everyone in the stadium realized that Derek wasn't dropping out of the race by hobbling off to the side of the track; no – he was actually continuing to run **on one leg**. He was attempting to hobble his way to the finish line. Slowly the crowd, in total disbelief, rose and began to roar. The roar got louder and louder. His face twisted with pain and tears. Derek limped onward.

In the meantime, Jim Redmond had finally gotten to the bottom of the stands. He leapt over the railing, avoided a security guard, and ran out to his son with two security people chasing after him.

***"That's my son out there!"***

he yelled back to security,

***"And I'm going to help him!"***

Finally, with Derek refusing to surrender and painfully limping along the track, Jim reached his son at the final curve – about 120 metres from the finish line – and wrapped his arm around Derek's waist.

***"I'm here son."***

Jim said, softly hugging his boy,

***"We'll finish together."***

Derek put his arms around his father's shoulders and sobbed. And with 65,000 people cheering, clapping, and crying, together, arm in arm, father and son finished the race.



Like I said: **just being there**. But being a father isn't easy. It takes time, it takes effort, it takes patience, and it takes **love** – which is why I emphatically believe that the first person of the Godhead is called **Father**. For He is the perfect example of what a father is to be like. Our Heavenly Father is the One:

- † **Who sees us,**
- † **Who watches over us, and**
- † **Who agonizes for us,**

**every second of our lives.** This is the loving Father Who is present throughout our earthly journey, ever nurturing and guiding us. For He alone can see the potholes and pitfalls long before we do, and He tries to protect us from falling. Our Heavenly Father helps us to make healthy choices and to live holy lives.

Today's Epistle Lesson (from 1 St. Peter 5:5-11) reminds us that a holy life is only possible through the grace of our Heavenly Father, and that God's grace only comes to the humble – that is, to those who know (and admit to) their own weakness and who do not give up the effort to resist temptation, but trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ).

Moreover, the Gospel Lesson for today (as found in St. Luke 15:1-10) is two parables which together form a lesson on grace AND LOVE, **for God loves us with a love that is not practical**. And as these two parables vividly illustrate, there is no length to which our loving Heavenly Father will NOT go for His children. Because God's grace is ready to pour into each one of us:

- ☞ however far from God we may be;
- ☞ regardless of how sinful we may be; and
- ☞ irrespective of how long we may take to open up to Him.

For our Heavenly Father knows that **admitting our need for our Him is the single biggest choice any of us will ever make in our entire lives.** Because it will determine where we shall spend **eternity.** And even though God has created us in His own image, thereby giving us the ability – and the freedom – to choose as WE see fit, as any genuinely loving Father would, He yearns for us to make **the right choice.** Thus:

- ☞ **with so much at stake, and**
- ☞ **with so much riding on the choice His children will all ultimately have to make,**

if (and when) ONE of those children finally chooses God, ALL of heaven stops to celebrate. ALL OF HEAVEN!

**Now, let's just think on that for a moment.**

Jesus Himself said – twice, in fact, in verses 7 and 10 of today's Gospel Lesson (so you can "take it to the bank"):

*"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over ONE SINNER who repents."*

But here's the kicker (because you know there's always going to be a kicker): we who purport to be His followers are called **to go and do likewise** (that is, to **rejoice** fully, completely, and unreservedly):

- ☞ **when a sinner,**
- ☞ **when one of God's wayward children,**
- ☞ **when one of us,**

responds in repentance to God's never-failing presence, and is, as a result, eternally saved and gets to spend life in heaven with Him, our loving Heavenly Father, **forever**.



So, this day,

This "Third Sunday After Trinity,"

This Father's Day,

Let us faithfully keep in our "Divinely-knitted" minds, and hearts, and souls:

- † that we are all God's children and should behave accordingly,
- † that our loving Heavenly Father is always there for us, and
- † that there is absolutely no end to the lengths to which He will go for His children to bring them safely across the finish line.



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