

Homily
Solemnity of Nativity of John the Baptist
June 24, 2018
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND FATHERHOOD

There's a very successful website based right here in Jenks, Oklahoma. Started in 2007 by a man named Brett McKay, it is the largest independent men's interest magazine on the web.

The website is called "The Art of Manliness." It's based upon the perception that modern men are confused about their role in society and what it means to be an honorable, well-rounded man. So its goal is to encourage its readers to be better husbands, fathers, brothers and citizens.

I haven't really checked, but I'm wondering if The Art of Manliness has ever done a story on John the Baptist, the saint whose birth we are honoring today. Now there's a real man, no question about it.

John roamed the desert, wearing clothing made of camel's hair. He lived off of locusts and wild honey. His basic message was to call people to repentance, which is not normally very popular. As to the Pharisees and Sadducees, he called them a brood of vipers and compared them to trees that should be cut down and thrown into a fire.

John the Baptist never compromised, he never backed off in the slightest, when it came to proclaiming the truth. That's what cost him his life. He stood up for the sacrament of marriage, and for this he was beheaded.

It seems to me that John the Baptist is a great model for what it means to be a man. Even though he was not married and did not have children, I think the way he lived gives us a very good example of fatherhood. And there are two particular characteristics of John the Baptist that I think all men and especially fathers should imitate.

Number One: John the Baptist's primary concern was his personal obedience to God and encouraging other people to be faithful to God's commandments.

Like John the Baptist, a father's primary role in the family is to teach God's ways to his children and to enforce God's commandments and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The father should be a model of the love of God but also be willing to enforce the "Thou shalt nots" that are part of our Catholic faith.

Number Two: John the Baptist was wild, but wild in a good way. He didn't care what other people thought. He didn't care about being popular. He wasn't afraid to be confrontational, even if that cost him his life, which it eventually did.

Like John the Baptist, fathers, especially these days, need to break from the pack. Being normal is no longer good enough. This may well mean that, on occasion, the father is unpopular even with his own family. Insisting on doing the right thing all the time can cause a lot of trouble these days when people can't seem to agree on what the right thing is. For John the Baptist, whatever God laid down as the law was good enough for him.

I know that at least one positive thing I did as a parent was make it clear to my children that I could care less what other parents were doing. Of course my children didn't like this. We were on a family road trip once, and the kids made a game of each one of them having to say what they were most afraid of. When all the children had finished the game, one of them called out, "What is Dad most afraid of?" My teen-age son yelled out "Normalness!" and everybody laughed.

In our house, we didn't have cable tv, we had no video games and none of my kids had a car until they got to college. We emphasized creativity, exercise and being together.

The most important gift a father can give his children is for them to know that God is in charge of **his** life. His authority in the family has no credibility unless everyone knows the father, just like John the Baptist, is trying to be fully obedient to God. St. Paul lays out the chain of command in the family in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which reads:

"I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife..."

So the question for every father in here, including me, is "Do your wife and children know for sure that Jesus is your boss, that your number one priority is to obey him and take your direction from him?"

Proverbs 29:18 says that "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Applied to the family, this means that if there is not a healthy, inspiring vision for the family, the family perishes. It goes the way of the world. What this means is that the father and mother, working together, must discern what is God's will for the family and share it with the children.

I love this passage in the First Book of Kings, Chapter 2, when King David is dying and gives his final instructions to his son, Solomon. He says:

“Take courage and be a man. Keep the mandate of the Lord, your God, following his ways and observing his statutes, commands, ordinances and decrees...that you may succeed in whatever you do...”

A father’s most solemn obligation is captured beautifully in God’s instructions found in Deuteronomy 11:

“Therefore, take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Bind them at your wrist as a sign, and let them be a pendant on your forehead. Teach them to your children, speaking of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. And write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates, so that, as long as the heavens are above the earth, you and your children may live on in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers he would give them.”

Let’s pray.

Lord, through the inspiration and intercession of John the Baptist, we pray that all the men of our parish will strive to know and love God, learn His ways, and honor God by the way they live. We pray that they will be examples of the Fatherhood of God in all they do and zealously share their faith with all those entrusted to them.

Amen.