

Father's Day Homily, June 16, 2013

by Jerry Bellows

Thanks to Gary, and to everyone that is here today.

My father is a good man and a good dad. I have been blessed to have him in my life and I am blessed that he is still in my life. He always held a steady job, he came home at night, he took the family on interesting camping trips and to visit lots of historical places. He and my mom celebrated their 65th anniversary last spring, shortly before she died.

He also took me to work with him every day. One of the perks for Dad's teaching job was that his kids all got scholarships to attend, the school where he taught. This led to one of the stressful hazards of my upbringing. The school was so small that Dad was the only teacher that taught the 8th grade boys. By default, I was in his classroom for a year. I had to address him as "Sir" or "Mr. Bellows", but never "Dad". He also told me I had to be better than anyone else to get the same grade.

My father wasn't a religious man, but he had been raised as a Baptist. I actually think that he's a Unitarian but doesn't know it. With his love of puns and stories, he probably belongs to the Church of the Good Humor.

He occasionally spoke in parables. One of his favorite stories was about the man who had a dog... (TELL THE STORY)

The punch line is "how's your dog?" (house your dog!) It took me years to figure out that putting the dog in the house was a euphemism for keeping one's temper under control.

Here's another parable, or perhaps we should call it a koan. At my niece's wedding, the MC invited all the married couples up for a dance. As the music progressed, the MC asked couples to stay on the dance floor if that had been married for more than ...1 day, 1 week, 1 year 5 years, 15 years, 25 years.... Etc. until my parents were the last couple dancing. The MC then interviewed them about what was their secret for staying together so long (at that point 56 years). My Dad's reply was a quote from an old radio show,

“Take two and hit to right”.

It took me quite a while to figure out how baseball applied to their marriage, but I think it means to wait first, listen and observe what is going on then try to do or say the right thing.

Last spring, I found my self giving my Dad driving lessons, kind of a role reversal from when I was 16 and he taught me to drive

His driver's license wasn't renewed because of his age but the Bureau of Motor Vehicles said that he would be allowed take a driving test, which he promptly flunked! He was dumbfounded! He had missed a stop and a crosswalk. He has always been a very good driver and he certainly modeled good driving habits for my driving.

So we spent a number of sessions practicing. We found he needed a cushion to sit on so he could see better and we practiced looking for pedestrian crossings and

other tricky situations. He failed a second test, but eventually earned it back. A restricted license: daylight only, and no more than 125 miles from his home. At ninety years of age, he's as determined to be as independent and self-directed as my sons seem to be.

Now I get to talk about the joys and hazards of being a Dad.

Slowly coming to the conclusion having children was not going to be a part of my life, I was quite surprised to discover that my new girlfriend was pregnant and that I would be a father at age 49 to Joshua and then again at age 50 to Solomon.

My life changed quickly. I was present at both of their births, and quickly became a hands-on Dad.

I think this story illustrates one of the challenges of being a dad. When Solomon was around three years old, he always wanted to help me cook. He would stand on a box beside the counter and stove and lend a hand to whatever I was preparing. He loved dropping a pat of butter in to the frying pan to see it sizzle, but he particularly liked breaking the eggs and stirring them up for an omlette or for pancakes.

Now one of my evening tasks was to entertain the boys, prepare and feed them supper, get them ready for bed and finally (at least I hoped it was the final activity) read them a story.

One night, I had made them something for supper, and Solomon had not been too interested in eating. We got distracted from our routine and by the time I was ready

for them to go to bed, Sol said he was hungry. It was getting late and so I replied with a parental ultimatum “NO, you already had a chance to eat your supper and you said you weren’t hungry. You’ll just have to go to bed now!”

The next morning, I found a fry pan on the stove with a slight residue of egg. I asked the boys’ mother if she had used the pan and she said it wasn’t her. So I asked Solly if he had used the pan during the night. His reply was “but I told you I was hungry!”

Mystery solved? But...

I was flabbergasted. My inner parent felt like Sol had disobeyed me. He certainly had done something potentially dangerous. He turned on the gas stove all by himself in the middle of the night! And how had he managed to take the carton of eggs out of the fridge, break a couple into the hot pan, without making a mess? Lord help us, if the Department of Social Services had gotten wind of this escapade!

But hazards come with joy....before I got into too much of a panic, I recognized just what capability three-year-old Solomon had displayed. The egg carton got back in the refrigerator without breaking or spilling. The gas stove got turned off!

Solomon showed initiative, level-headedness and motor skills. All the things that I would have liked to teach him! He was determined to be as independent and self-directed as his grandfather has been about keeping his drivers license!

So in conclusion, I’d like to say..... In fatherhood, there is no conclusion. It is never ending. Id’ like to wish everyone a happy Father’s Day.