

Rev. Donato Infante III

Father's Day 2018

It was in the news this morning that a snake ate a woman whole in Indonesia. In the wild, snakes are one of the most dangerous animals to man, which is why Genesis presents to us the snake as man's worst enemy. Other cultures have the snake as man's worst enemy in their myths as well. (I don't say myth to imply Genesis is false, but to speak about the literary genre and how it is used to convey truth.) But if I wrote Genesis, I would have proposed a different worst enemy: the woodchuck. They may look cute, but they eat people's gardens, and they have to eat enough to hibernate all winter. This is why man's best friend is dog. Dogs love to chase woodchucks. Growing up, we just had to say the word and our dog would go dashing out the door ready to protect our garden.

About gardens, our Lord says today, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how."

In regards to the Kingdom, this is true, but it is no sound advice about gardening. Man works hard to protect those crops. A similar mission is given to the parents in baptism. They are handed a candle of the newly baptized and told, "Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly." The parents are to protect the child from evil, whether that is in their own hearts, the world, or the Snake.

Men and women do this in somewhat different ways. We see this in nature, and a book by a secular psychologist I just read confirmed this. No one gets between a mama bear and her cubs. She is there to protect them from harm. Men, on the other hand, prepare their kids to be adults. Think of Mufasa in the Lion King. He is a good enough father to give his life for his son, but he works hard to prepare his son Simba to eventually be on his own. One time, he takes him out for his morning walk and lessons, saying in the way that only James Earl Jones can say, "One day, Simba, the sun will set on my time here, and will rise with you as the new king." Now, this work of preparing young people to be adults is not just the work of biological fathers. Fatherhood is the vocation of every man, whether biological or in another sense. Call it mentoring if you want, but it is fatherhood. This is why we know teachers, stepparents, a friend's father, a neighbor, or an uncle can do this role. And if you have doubts it is important, look at the statistical correlation between those who perpetuate acts of violence in schools and those who lack a strong male role model.

Dads help their children, both sons and daughters, to grow up in a particular way by having those important conversations with their children, about the challenges of peer pressure, advice on dating, how to survive college, and this continues into adulthood, as they tell their grown

children from time to time their wisdom about raising children. It is not a parent confessing mistakes to a child, but recognizing that the struggle is real and what they have found that works in those situations. Young people need this wisdom because if they don't get it from their parents, they will get it from peers, which is an act of collective ignorance, or Netflix or Google. Parents, fathers, they would rather hear it from you, even if they don't act like it sometimes. It can be as simple as watching the same shows they watch with them and discussing it, or introducing them to the great classics of film and TV. "This was my favorite when I was your age, and here is why," speaks volumes about life and the wisdom you have gained. I know we have good men, good fathers, here. I see when because I work with our teens, and they tell me. I've talk to you about parenting. I desire to affirm all the good you are already doing, and encourage you to do more.

But it is not just worldly wisdom they need to hear. Men, the Church needs you to take your place in participating in the life of the Church. Very often when it comes to parish life, men are content to be pew potatoes and allow the majority of ministries to be run by women. Yes, we have an all male clergy, but almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of volunteers are women. That doesn't mean we need less women in ministries. It means many men are opting out and the Church is missing a whole cohort of people whose talents are not being put to use. I don't just mean liturgical ministry, as important as that is. A great deal of our talents could be put at the service of God, if we were all a bit more creative. Example: you fix cars as a hobby? Tell your pastor you would love to fix the cars of people who cannot afford to see a mechanic. That's a new ministry!

It is a stereotype that men appreciate frankness, but it is a stereotype that is well-deserved, so I will end rather frankly: men, God gave you particular gifts and strengths, and he intends you to use them. He has a purpose for you. This purpose is in your home, in your community, and in your Church. Like the man in the parable where God gives growth to what the man sows, what you do echoes in eternity. You may not see or understand how it is that you bring about the growth of the Kingdom of God. But that's your mission. Do you dare be the man God is calling you to be?