

## Message to Fathers

I'm very glad for the men of our parishes who cherish their wives, work hard for those they love, and share in their children's lives – whether at mealtime, hanging out at home, building things together, or through sports and other activities. More importantly, I hope you enjoy and treasure them and having them as part of your life. I'm especially glad because I know that it's not easy being a dad today. For starters, dad's today are generally expected to do more in the home than was expected of my dad. In many ways that is a good thing. By itself that wouldn't be a big deal. But many workplaces have made cuts in recent years, expecting workers to do more with less; work is very demanding. I could see how it would feel overwhelming at times. Third, it's not uncommon today to see portrayals of fatherhood in sitcoms that are dismissive of fathers or even undermine the role you have in the household. I think of Homer Simpson – where the father is portrayed as a buffoon – as someone the family might be better off without. That doesn't make it a bad show – it can be funny, brilliant at times. But if many shows feature a dad who seems irresponsible, it can be hard to find a good model for you to look up to. Finally, fathers want to know their family is safe and secure. In our society as a whole there are fewer shared values and more disagreement on fundamental ideas about good and bad, right and wrong. That generally means more dangers to your children (hurtful words in a YouTube video or celebration of harmful lifestyle choices or less certainty about the moral character of people that will be around your son or daughter). In many ways teaching kids good from bad requires more vigilance today. It's a hard job sometimes, being a dad, and I want you to succeed. You can and many of you are. Thank you.

The thing that stood out most about my own dad is that he was *dependable*. My dad was a dairy farmer, so he was up every morning to take care of the cows. (We had to care for the cows every morning, too, but our dad was the first one to the barn and did not expect us to be out as early as he was.) I always knew he was on the farm – that he was at home. As a child that was a very reassuring thought. I could count on him when I needed him. As a Church and as a nation, we are better off when our children know their dad is available for them.

I leave you with two challenges: make a place for God in your daily life and find someone to look up to. Making a place for God might sound like righteous, empty-talk. After all this is America, the land of the free and the place of the self-made man. When that means striving for excellence, it's very commendable. However, Jesus himself said, "Without me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5)." He's God; I take him at his word. So if you're doing many good and wonderful things, if you're not making time for him, something is missing. Find someone to look up to. For many it will be your own dad. Dads have been around as long as there have been babies, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Find a man with qualities that you admire and strive to be that for your own kids. Or in the words of a Brad Paisley song, be "half the dad he didn't have to be."