

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

My Grandpa Turner died 3 years before I was born. My dad looked up to his dad as a father, a businessman, and a coach—he taught Dad how to play catch. Dad also said his father smoked 2 packs of cigarettes every day: one Camel and one Virginia Extra. Grandpa had a stroke in his mid-50s and died of heart failure at the age of 74. He was 10 years older than my grandmother. My father never criticized his dad. But Dad never smoked, and I always felt that was one way he wanted to be not like his father. There were other differences—My dad married a woman one year younger than he was, and he lived to the age of 83. On Fathers' Day we can reflect on how we imitate and how we differ from our dads.

Saint Paul turns our attention today to the Father of us all, Adam. We are beginning a series of readings from Paul's most important epistle, the Letter to the Romans. It supplies all our second readings from now until the middle of September - a full three months. Earlier this year Deacon Steve offered a study on the same epistle, so some of you will hear these passages with especially well-trained ears. Romans is Paul's tour-de-force, the fruit of lectures, arguments and religious experiences that formed Paul into a dominant figure. The letter is worth reading in one sitting. According to the last chapter of Romans, a scribe named Tertius wrote out the letter as Paul dictated it, and Paul entrusted the scroll—a hand-written original book of the bible—into the hands of a person he called a deacon, a woman named Phoebe. She delivered it and probably read it out loud when she arrived, answering questions that surely arose.

In today's passage, Paul explains sin and grace. You get the full impact of Jesus' resurrection if you have first faced the enormity of sin, which Paul traces all the way back to Adam. Adam brought sin into the world, and his sin brought death into the world. We still speak of original sin: we are born into a condition in which we die physically and spiritually. Baptism removes original sin, and Mary was conceived without original sin—the Immaculate Conception. After baptism, we are still inclined to commit personal sin, but a Second Adam, Jesus Christ, has overcome all sin and offers us forgiveness and strength.

The Catholic Church does not cling to a literal interpretation of the account of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. Our catechism says in paragraph 283, "The question about the origins of the world and of [humans] has been the object of many scientific studies which have splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life-forms and the appearance of [humanity]. These discoveries invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator, prompting us to give him thanks for all his works and for the understanding and wisdom he gives to scholars and researchers." However humanity came to be, God wondrously made us, sin entered our nature, and God redeemed us through Jesus Christ.

On this Fathers' Day, we look back on Adam or whoever were our first parents. They surely possessed qualities to imitate and from which to differ. We want to be like Adam the believer, the hard worker, the husband and father, but not like Adam the tempted, the rebellious, the sinner. Like any father, each of us has good and bad traits. We will sin, but God stands ready to offer grace.

Sunday, June 21, 2020