

For Father's Day (Dr. Nikolaos Koios, Content Coach of Pemptousia)

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In traditional societies, the father figure was always dominant. In Christian theology, the person of the Father is the very principle of the Godhead, the Begetter of the Son outside of time, and of the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from Him, also outside of time. The Father pours out the fulness of divinity onto the Son. Only the Son knows the essence of the Father and makes Him known to us through His incarnate dispensation. Human paternity is an image of divine Fatherhood. Christ Himself makes this point when He says: 'What father among you, if his son asks for bread, would give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish would give him a snake instead of the fish?' . The generosity of the Father towards His children, to the point of self-sacrifice, is thought to be inherent in the very capacity of any father.



Father's Day, however, like other such anniversaries, has been taken over in large part by non-religious people, on the basis of their secular society and its dictates. Yet its historical provenance appears to be very different. Father's Day, as an organized celebration seems to have begun in Fairmont, West Virginia on 5 July 1908. It was the inspiration of Grace Golden Clayton, who wished to honour 210 fathers who lost their lives in a mining disaster known as the Monagah Tragedy, which had occurred some months earlier in the state, in December 1907. Even though another, later celebration then prevailed and became established, this first effort highlights certain very apposite features of the role of a father.

According to Professor Fr. Vasileios Kalliakmanis, a father is: 'the person who shoulders most of the weight and is called upon to be the servant of the family. In that sense, he's considered, in Christian tradition, to be the head of the woman. The responsibilities of the husband as a father are also incomparably greater for another reason. The image that children have of their own father is what they project onto their spiritual father and, in the end, onto God Himself. Any negative sentiments or enmity between children and their father during their childhood can have disastrous consequences for their lives as Christians. If they reject their father, they also reject God the Father' .

Despite the apparent power of the male sex and the image which many people have of the imposing presence of the father figure, things don't always work out in accordance with the above stereotype. Continuing his line of thinking, Fr. Vasileios comments: 'It's been claimed that the woman can be considered unfairly treated by society, but she has the feminist movement and her children as her allies. The husband provides for the family financially, but feels that the children side with his wife. So he may be marginalized, stuck in front of the television, a man of few words. On occasion, when he's had enough, he may start shouting. This is an attempt to retain his standing in a manner that was once acceptable...' .

Grace Golden Clayton's efforts to establish a celebration of Father's Day for the first time brings us back to the true value of the paternal presence. Two hundred and ten fathers lost their lives in mines in an effort to provide their families with their daily necessities. Millions of fathers have sacrificed their lives, health, free time, peace and quiet, everything on the altar of providing survival. And this sacrifice has been a conscious choice, in a spirit of joy and a selfless gift. A father gives, and it's his joy to see his children happy at what he provides. Being a father means both love and generosity.

Divine love and generosity, through which the Father gives everything to His Son , enables the Son to present all of us to the Father as His brothers and sisters. In other words, He gives all of us the right to be children of God. We can all turn to God and address Him as 'Our Father...' .

Every recollection of earthly paternity, with its generous and loving character-however imperfect this may sometimes be- is simply an image of the perfect generosity and love of our Heavenly Father. The 210 coal miners in Virginia sacrificed their lives for the survival of their children, as have countless other men. Our Heavenly Father sacrificed His Only-Begotten Son and Word for the sake of us, who are made in His image, so that we can have not only life, but a superabundance of life.

This is why we rightly celebrate Father's Day.