

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.(Genesis 21:8)

Today is Father's Day a special day when we say thank you to our fathers. In the dictionary there are many meanings to the word "father". Here are a few of them, a male parent, a stepfather, an adoptive father, a male ancestor, a respected elderly man, a male priest, a teacher. We also have endearing names we call our fathers, you might call him dad, daddy, papa, pa or father, me and my siblings called our father papa. And Jesus calls God the Father Abba, a name that demonstrate honour, love and reverence. You see, a father could be your real dad, or a stepdad who treats you like a son or daughter, a preacher or maybe a teacher who teaches us important things. Or your father is a wonderful person who does special things with you such as play cricket, football or cook, teach you to ride a bicycle, reads the bible or bible stories to you and teaches you about God, among all the things he can teach you that's important. Do you know that some children do not see their fathers or may see them occasionally but may have had a step-dad, an older male relative, or teacher who takes the of father in their life. Or others who could not see their fathers because they are cruel and unkind to them when they are together.

In the bible reading from the Old Testament we hear about Abraham who gave a great feast when his son Isaac was weaned (weaning takes place when a child is 2, 3 or perhaps even 4 years and stops taking his mother's milk and begins to eat food like the adults). Today children are weaned at earlier age although some may take longer. In Old Testament days and early Christianity the practice of marking when a child is weaned with a celebratory feast was normal but not so today but in many traditions there are other occasions when we have a feast to celebrate such as baptism or birthday, admission to 1<sup>st</sup> communion or confirmation when family and friends are invited to join the family. Fathers also celebrate with their children when they reach other milestones such as finish year 6, pass 11 plus exams and as we get older such as GCSE's, A' levels, graduate from university many more which you can add on. Do you remember an occasion when there was a celebration for you because you have reached a milestone in your life?

So today many people children and adults will be saying thank you to their fathers for the care they have given them by giving them gifts and for those whose fathers have died may be remembered fondly and will say prayers for them. And let us not forget those who had difficult relationships with their fathers that this may be a time to forgive, a time for reconciliation.

The gospels tell us of such a difficult relationship of father and son (this could very easily be a father and daughter). A rich man had two sons, one day the younger son told his father to give him his share of the property, the father did exactly that, he shared the property between older and younger sons. The younger son left and went to a faraway country where he squandered all that was given him and had no money left and could only find work to look after pigs which paid very little not even enough to eat and considered eating the pigs feed. When he came to his senses, he decided to go back home to seek forgiveness from his Father, saying to himself that even the hired hands of his

father had enough to eat. As he approached his home, his father recognised him from a distance and ran, embraced him and was glad to have him back, he was forgiven and celebrated his return with a feast (Luke 15:11-32).

Jesus told this parable to his followers to remind us of God the Father's love for us that when we say we are sorry we will be forgiven and teaches us humility. The rich man forgave his younger son because he realised what he did was wrong and came back home to ask for forgiveness. The rich man in this parable of Jesus represents God and the son could be any one of us and as we are born sinners, when sin and turn back to God seeking forgiveness in humility, He will forgive us because he loves us and will celebrate with a feast whenever a sinner returns home to Him.

We may recollect another story in the bible of about a boy named Samuel who was brought to the temple (like a church) to be taught by a priest/preacher Eli. Eli taught Samuel how to listen to God. Samuel grew and became a very great man of God because he learned how to listen to God (1Samuel 1:19-28). We should be thankful for having a dad that loves us or having someone that treats us like they are a dad to us. This is what today is about. If you have a dad that does things with you or not, there is one Father that has promised to always be with you and will be Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5), He will never leave us nor make a mistake, we can trust him completely. Father God wants us to talk to him like we talk to our dads or a good friend. Praying is talking to God, He loves us and wants us to love him back, so why don't we start talk to him now?

So as we celebrate Father's Day, we pray to you gracious God, we give you thanks for our earthly fathers and help us daily to show our love and appreciation to them and may we always remember to show our love to you our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.