

In the Church's calendar it's Trinity Sunday, while in the civil calendar this is Father's Day weekend, but these are not unrelated. I want to start with the first reading from Proverbs. Wisdom is speaking of its relationship with the Creator. In the Christian tradition Wisdom is sometimes identified with the Second Person of the Trinity. In this passage, Wisdom says of the Father, "I was his delight day by day, playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of the earth."

I want to look at this "play" within the Trinity. I remember a family at a previous parish. Before or after mass the toddlers would ask their Dad to toss them. This meant, I soon learned, that their Father was supposed to reach down, take hold of them with both hands then toss them into the air a few feet above his head – and then catch them as they fell and lower them to the ground – and then to repeat the maneuver for as long as his back lasted. [Eventually I was also asked, pleaded with, to toss them up. I took this as a sign of spiritual

fatherhood, but they probably would have taken any launchpad available.]

But it wasn't just this family. I've seen other children enjoy the same game. And it's more a father thing than a mother thing. The child usually squeals with delight as he or she is launched upward. And the father and child look at each other, smiling, the whole time.

I thought about this form of play while praying about Trinity Sunday and the Holy Trinity. That image of the father and child, holding each other, then the father releasing the child, and the child once more falling into the father's arms, looking at each other with delight the whole time – that's what the Trinity is like. Yes, it's an analogy of the Father sending the Son to earth, into time, as a human being, and the Son returning from the cross to sit at the right hand of the Father. But it's the way the Trinity always is.

We can sometimes think of God as distant, powerful, completely other than us. There is truth in that. And sometimes that is how human

fathers can also be -- or at least seem. But God is not only all-powerful, absolutely different from creation. God has also become one of us in Jesus -- human, weak, dying. He is distant. He is also close. God gives. God receives. God is a relationship of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lover, Beloved, and the Love that joins them. God is love. God is a changeless flow, a rhythm, like a father tossing his son in the air and catching him again and again -- forever. The Holy Spirit is that bond -- the physical bond of strong hands holding tight -- and the power of gravity -- that keeps them joined together.

In fact, St. John Paul II, when he was still Karol Wojtyla and meditating on the Trinity, wrote in his play Radiation of Fatherhood “[I]n the end . . . everything else will turn out to be unimportant and inessential, except for this: Father, child, love.”

On this Father’s Day weekend, I just want to remind you fathers of how much the heavenly Father calls you to imitate Him and His love for the Son. The Holy Spirit connects you with your own sons and

daughters, just as surely as He is the love between the first and second Persons of the Trinity. Your children need your strength and your gentleness – how you protect and take pride in them and yet are humble enough to absorb your children’s faults and even sin, without losing your love for them, or abandoning them.

I am surprised -- maybe I shouldn’t be -- but I think our contemporary society underestimates the importance of fatherhood, so I’m surprised by the way independent studies and polls, religious and secular, have revealed again and again, the power of a father in a child’s religious life. Forget the theology for the moment, sociology tends to reveal that a father has a stronger influence on a child’s retaining a faith into adulthood compared to the mother. There seems to be statistically significant data to show that the father’s spiritual leadership in the family is crucial.

So, fathers, I thank you for the times when you have led the family in prayer, when you got your children ready for mass, when you

showed them an example of worshipping God. I thank you for the times when you showed your daughters that they have and deserve a man who loves them just for who they are, and showed your sons that manliness isn't based on sexual conquests and physical strength, but integrity, character, and moral courage. I thank you for the times you showed your children that your career is something that deserves your best, and yet, is not the measure of your value. I thank you for staying true when life gets hard and sticking with it out because you gave your promise. I thank you for the times you showed your children the joy to be gained by living in this world without being owned by it. I thank you for all the times you looked your children in the eye and told you them you loved them.

They notice such things. Those children love being thrown and caught by their fathers because life is designed by God to imitate Himself, the Trinity – or rather, not imitate, but participate in the Trinity. We are made by Love Himself, to love one another. We are

meant to delight in one another, to look to one another even when we're thrown apart, to come back to one another, to give, to receive, command, obey, live, die, all the while bound to one another by a force more powerful than the gravity that brings a child back to his or her father's arms. In the end everything else will turn out to be unimportant except for this: Father, child, love: the Trinity among us.