

A Happy and Blessed Father's Day to all the fathers here this morning! You know, it's not easy being a dad. Take it from this one man, speaking from his own experience a few years ago, he said: Children go through four fascinating stages. First they call you Da-da. Then they call you Daddy. As they get a little older they call you Dad. Finally, on Father's Day they call you **collect**. Updating that illustration for today it would end with: "Finally, they call you on Father's Day on the cell phone plan that you're still paying for!"

I think that's a pretty good joke **about** Dads but that's not to be confused with a "Dad **Joke**". Now, for those unfamiliar with the term, a Dad joke is the kind of a joke told by dads that makes you groan. Like when the girl said to her father: "Dad can you put the cat out?", and he replied, "I didn't know it was on fire." Or the man who said, "I used to hate facial hair...but then it grew on me." Oh, and, "Why are elevator jokes so classic and good? Because they work on many levels." Or how about this one: "I once had a dream I was floating in an ocean of orange soda. Actually, it was more of a Fanta sea"

Okay, I think you get the idea. So, "When does a joke become a dad joke? When it becomes apparent." And one more thing, "It's inappropriate to make a 'dad joke' if you're not a dad. It's a faux pa."

But, seriously, today we give thanks for our fathers. We love our dads. They give us the guidance, wisdom, direction, and strong love we need for our lives. Another thing dads do is make us feel safe. When we were young, we could rest better at night when Dad was home to protect us from bad guys, house fires, and even the bogeyman.

We all have fears in life, some of them are imagined and some are real. Many of these fears we have learned to overcome, maybe with the help of our dads, like the fear of learning how to ride a bike, or the fear of going to the dentist. Other fears are ones we may still be scared to face up to, like speaking before a large group of people or flying in an airplane.

Whatever it is, fear can sometimes actually be a good thing. Fear keeps us from doing foolish things, like doing extremely dangerous stunts on our bicycle when we were young, or driving too fast on a slippery road at night after we got our driver's license, or as an adult, charging more money on credit cards than we could ever afford to pay back.

Fear can have its bad side too, though. Fear can keep us from living up to the potential that the Lord has for our life and for the lives of those around us.

Consider the fear that affects sharing your faith in God with others. Has fear ever kept you from talking to others about Jesus? If you're like a lot of

Christians, you may be afraid that if you do try to talk to someone you know about your faith in Christ they will think you're strange, a "Bible-Thumper", a "Jesus-Freak", and never treat you the same way again. If you're in grade school, maybe you're afraid of the other kids making fun of you for believing that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again so you, too will live forever. Or, as a teenager maybe you are afraid that others will think you're not cool because you want to do what God in His Word says is best for you. That means not getting drunk, not doing drugs and it means waiting until you're married to have intimate relations. If you're an adult, maybe you are afraid that friends or family members will shun you if, for example, you tell them you don't appreciate listening to them taking God's name in vain.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Matthew shares one of Jesus' sermons where He spoke to His disciples about not being afraid to take a stand for their faith in Him. He urges them to be bold and tell others the truth of the Good News of God's kingdom, regardless of the consequences.

In last week's Gospel lesson, we heard how Jesus sent His apostles out into a hostile world to proclaim the nearness of God's kingdom. Today's Gospel continues those instructions. Here Jesus encourages His disciples to be bold in their proclamation even though they will encounter some violent opposition. What Jesus said to them He also says to us. We are going to have problems with the world because of our association with Jesus, but He encourages us to acknowledge Him before people, promising that **He** will acknowledge **us** before His Father.

"A student is not above his teacher," Jesus told them, "nor a servant above his master." We acknowledge that Jesus is our Lord and Master. As His disciples and servants, we have to expect to be treated like He was. And so that we never become tempted to shrink back from our Lord and deny Him, Jesus issues this stern warning: "Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."

Calvin Coolidge, the 30th President of the United States, was born on the fourth of July way back in 1872. Known as "Silent Cal," he was once asked by a reporter about a meeting. Coolidge replied, "I have nothing to say—and don't quote me." Now, contrast that with Jesus' statements in our text to "speak in the **daylight**" and "**proclaim** from the roofs." When it comes to our faith in Him, Jesus does **not** want us to be like silent Cal! But rather, we are to be bold, acknowledge Him, and tell everyone what He has done. Acknowledge is the key word I'd like us to now focus on.

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” We **acknowledge** that our heavenly Father is mightier than all our enemies—human and demonic combined. We confess in our creeds that Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. Nevertheless, we tend to fear people and their reactions too **much**, and we tend to fear God too **little**. We need to hear God’s victorious Son tell us that the Father wants to preserve us and take us to life eternal, not deny and destroy us.

Next, Jesus uses the examples of sparrows and hairs on our head to demonstrate just how deep the Father’s love for us is. This love was demonstrated most powerfully when the Father sent His Son. Without fear Jesus loudly proclaimed the kingdom of God, despite insults and taunts. He worked and spoke as long as there was daylight. He courageously walked the road to Calvary, where His body was nailed to the cross—as were our **sins- all** of them- including the times when we fail to boldly acknowledge Him before other people. God the Father, the One who judges justly raised Him to life again. Christ now has the keys of death and hell and has opened heaven’s gates for **us**.

The apostle Peter is probably the most obvious example of a person who was filled with fear and disowned Christ, but later was forgiven and courageously **confessed** Christ. This was Peter’s bold acknowledgment of Jesus on the day of Pentecost: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Peter continued this proclamation throughout his life and often suffered because of it. (See Acts 5:18, 40; Jn 21:18–19.)

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” We acknowledge that our gracious Lord and Master has prepared for us eternal salvation. At the Last Day He will acknowledge us, His disciples and servants, before the entire court of heaven, leading us right up to the Father’s throne. We learn from and serve Him who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” acknowledging Him to others so that they too will learn of Him, confess Him, and be acknowledged in heaven.

Speaking of acknowledge, (and speaking of the fourth of July, as I did a moment ago; I really love the upcoming holiday, by the way, every year I have a **blast!**- See what I did there? That was another Dad joke!) Seriously though, the last line of the Declaration of Independence (which is a form of acknowledgment) reads: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each

other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” How much more reliable is the protection of our loving God, who has power over body and soul, life and death, as demonstrated by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Trusting Him, we confidently acknowledge *Jesus Christ* before all people.

Sometimes acknowledging our Lord Jesus before others does make things complicated. People may ridicule us Christians, avoid us, and maybe even harm us. We can become fearful or become depressed and lament, like Jeremiah did. But the Lord protected His prophet, Jeremiah, and *he* acknowledged, “Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.” Jesus Christ, who has rescued us from sin, death, Satan, and every evil, will also protect us in this world that would destroy us, but cannot. We acknowledge Him!