

Divine Model of Parenthood

When it comes to speaking about God, we must be careful about the language we use. The reason for this strictness of speech is on account of the very specific way God reveals Himself to the world. Speaking to His people of old, God instructed them not to make graven images of the Divine— neither male nor female or anything else resembling creation (Deut. 4:15-18). Idolatry, then, is a confusion of God with creation. God is not like us, He is wholly other, uniquely different and set apart. God Himself is neither male nor female. He stands outside of gender. God is not masculine any more than He is feminine. He reveals Himself according to the masculine pattern not because He is male but because He conforms to His own order of creation. Christ came as a male not because of who God is by nature, but because of who we are by nature. Christ came to be the firstborn of the newly recreated humanity as Adam was the firstborn of the old humanity in the Garden of Eden. God is neither male nor female, but we are male and female. Gender is a very sensitive topic in our time, but part of gender confusion can be traced back to the original sin to be altogether like God. The denial of gender is but another way humanity attempts to attain godhood; seeking to be like the true God, who transcends all gender categories. The confession of the Church has always been our distinct gender as male and female reflects deep truths about our eternal God. In the beginning, we are told, God created humanity in His image and likeness. But what we may not always think about is that God's image manifests itself differently in males and females. Only as the two genders are understood holistically is God's complete image comprehended. This sheds light on the profound nature of marriage as male and female are brought together into a one flesh union. This also adds a depth to the miracle of procreation. The family unity of mother and father and children reflects the deeper unity of the Trinitarian relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Of course, we live in a broken world and nothing functions as it should. We fail every day to live up to this image and likeness. With that being said, though, the world right now is in desperate need of

strong fathers and mothers. But somewhere along the way we have forgotten what that even means. Seeing how today is Mother's Day, let's spend just a few moments trying to retrace the biblical concept of parenthood. As Christians, we do not look to the world for guidance on this, but to God Himself. If we confess that we are made in the image of God then there must be something in the mystery of the Trinitarian relationship that provides us an example of what it means to be good fathers and mothers. Perhaps you have your own ideas about this, but what jumps out at me is the Unity and Distinction of God. We confess that God is both one substance/essence/being and at the same time three distinct persons. To say it another way: God is One-in-Three and Three-in-One. God, then, is both Independent and Dependent at the very same time. He is completely unified as one God, but completely individuated as three separate persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To be fully human and reach our full human potential, then, we must somehow incorporate both independence and dependence within ourselves. It is my belief that we learn how to do this from our parents. If one or the other parent is absent then this dependence/independence model is fractured. Unfortunately, many children (including myself) grow up with this lack. Without one or the other parent, a child becomes either overly dependent and fails to thrive or overly independent and fails to learn intimacy. Each parent, then, is entrusted with one aspect of the dependence/independence model. Both parents reflect God's love, but they do so in different ways. To be sure, there is crossover in parental guidance, but as I see it, fathers primarily reflect God's love by cultivating within their children a sense of independence. The child learns to see him/herself as existing independently. Like the three separate persons of the Trinity, the child learns from her father that she exists in her own right. She is worthy of her own integrity and dignity. She has her own path to follow and is worthy of respect for the individual she is. This is important for a child's development as one day that same child will be an adult and leave her immediate family to begin her own family according to the same Divine pattern.

Mothers, on the other hand, primarily foster in their children a sense of dependence. Like the unity that exists within God Himself, mothers create a sense of solidarity and acceptance within their children. Children come to understand they belong somewhere in this world by experiencing their mother's love. A mother's sacrificial love binds a child to the family. After all, where would we be without the unconditional love of our mothers? Such love establishes and grounds us. It also shapes our conception of 'home'—not just as a physical place, but as a spiritual reality. Maybe this accounts for why God compares Himself to a mother hen trying to gather her chicks together or why He calls Himself a Unifying Spirit seeing how the word 'spirit' is a feminine noun in the Bible. Again, not that God is female, but because the mother, more than anyone else on earth, reflects God's nurturing attributes. Together, mothers and fathers help to establish the right balance between the two opposing extremes of living for yourself but also for another, existing in yourself but also in another.

On this very special day when we celebrate motherhood let us do so with an eye toward God, who is the very pattern of all parenthood. We parents are but poor imitators of our eternal God and His love for us. But no matter how broken we are as individuals, no matter how broken our families are, we have a more certain promise from God. God promises to form us into a new family where we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. And in this new heavenly family, it is not the blood that courses through our veins that unites us together, but the blood that was shed for us by Christ, our true brother, who by His death showed us just how far He was willing to go to unite us to His eternal Father and bring us into our eternal home. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy Mills