07/09/2020

What Father’s Day means in the Orthodox Church

Around Australia, thousands of Greeks celebrate Father’s Day. Father’s Day truly honours fatherhood – fathers, pappou’s (grandfathers) and those who are a father figure in our lives. We also celebrate the influence fathers have in our society.

Most Greeks are Orthodox Christians and for many, the meaning of Father’s Day is more deeply rooted.

Our greatest father, Jesus Christ, is seen as a compassionate, merciful, forgiving, grace-filled Father, one whose love for us is unconditional and unlimited, who forgives all his flock time and time again and gives us hope.

I highlight this image of God because this is the truest definition of a father. A father watches over his family, provides for them, gives support and care, and protects family, honour and has a deep responsibility of duty. This is mirrored with how Jesus Christ cares for his faithful.

The fifth commandment states: “Honour thy father and thy mother”.

This commandment to honour one’s human parents is compared to honouring God. That is the true correlation between our human fathers and our almighty Father, Jesus Christ. We must also honour God as our heavenly Father, as we honour our parents.

What about those who don't have human fathers? Orphans, lost or stolen generations, children who are victims of humanitarian crisis; how do they celebrate Father's Day? They have a father too, although they may not realise it.

Jesus Christ, who watches over these children and cares for them, is their heavenly father. God is the great protector and loving Father of all children living as orphans.

Psalm 68:5 says, "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows, is God in his holy habitation." This should inspire us to act accordingly, give alms to the poor, help out sick or needy children, and imitate God's indescribable heart for the parentless or fatherless people.

A spiritual Father can also act as a 'father figure', as can our priest. That is what is so unique about the Orthodox Church! Even those who are fatherless and orphans, have Jesus Christ as their father.

The Reverend Father Constantine Varipatis, the parish priest at St. Stylianos Greek Orthodox Parish in Gymea, and author of 'Marriage and the Freedom of the Human Person: Based on the Poetry of Archbishop Stylianos of Australia, 1995'; explained the importance of fathers and father's day like this in his 2020 Father's Day Sermon:

"Both physical and Spiritual Fathers are of utmost importance in today's modern society, which is a very difficult society to live in with many experiencing loss of identity, loss of direction in life, isolation and the implications of Covid-19". He also stated that "Fatherhood is the roots and identity of every child. Fatherhood is a sense of security, a sense of home and warmth".

With these graceful words, Father Constantine is expressing how important a father is, especially in today's modern society where the notion of Fatherhood is not as strong or influential as it used to be. He also reminds us that Christianity is regarded as a religion of love and that we must love our fellow human being the same way Jesus Christ loves us.

May we love and cherish our fathers, and father figures on this wonderful day, and show our gratitude dutifully. Happy Father's Day!
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