

**Father's Day**  
**Matthew 9, 36 - 10, 8**  
**Deacon George Collins**

The primary message of today's gospel is rather simple; by accepting, or at least having an openness to the Good News and the bearers of the Good News, healing will follow. Healing will follow even if we have only a simple faith. But if we have no faith, healing is impossible. To the pagans and the Gentiles, healing could not be accomplished for as yet they had no faith. The Samaritans were also outside the Jewish sphere and did not worship in Jerusalem.

This event is also setting the pattern of activity for the evangelizing efforts of Jesus' mission on earth; the activity of his Church, when it eventually receives its final commission to "go forth and teach all nations." The final call to all the baptized, even today, is to be an evangelizing and missionary people and family.

Jesus directs the Apostles to go only to the house of Israel, for it was the house of Israel that awaited the coming of the Messiah. They had first claim on the Good News. It was they who awaited in suffering and anticipation for the fulfillment of God's promise of a savior.

The evangelizing efforts of Jesus' mission on earth now expands, as he admits others to share in his mission, his powers. Jesus, for the first time, commissions the Apostles to proclaim the Good News on a wider scale than he could reach personally. But for now the Apostles must be instructed and directed on how and what would be expected of them. We might say that this going forth was an 'on-the-job' training experience.

Jesus felt compassion for the multitude; for they were lying on the ground exhausted from the exploitations of their daily lives. The multitude are usually the poor, who are harassed and bothered by the thousands of petty persecutions and annoyances to which the poor are always subjected. The Pharisees, using a politically correct

term of the day referred to them as the “sheep without a shepherd”, and as “the people of the land”; a term used not out of compassion or sympathy, but used to denigrate the poor and the ignorant, who did not know the law well enough to observe it, or who could not afford to observe it. “The people of the land” were the spiritually unenlightened. The “sheep without a shepherd” were those poor and underprivileged who had no advocate to stand up for them, or to champion their cause. They were as the fatherless of the land. And as fatherless, they were unprotected, they were subject to the unclean spirits, which are the evils that affect and damage the mind and the soul, as well as the body. The slavery and exploitation of social ills, which are most in need of healing, are those derisive forces which lead to the destruction of family and spiritual life.

These Apostles were the first of many millions of laborers that God has sent to the harvest over the past 2000 years. They are not only the fathers of the Church, but the fathers of good Christian families. And the tools of the harvesters are the individual God-given talents we each have, and the sufferings for love that God provides in our lives. But we can see even today how few laborers come forth because of lack of commitment or preoccupation with worldly matters. If we cannot be for God, how can we be for family?

Today, in the 1990's, the mark of social progress that society promotes is again to be politically correct in our statements, relationships and activities. In recent newspaper articles we see that the state and federal governmental agencies are putting on a get tough drive to secure child support payments, not out of justice, but for fear of arrest or the burden to the public treasury. The definition of a bad father is now one who doesn't pay child support. Conversely, it is implied that a good father is one who does pay child support, as if this was the hallmark of success. To be politically correct in these terms is to promote a shortage of moral fiber. This amounts to the praising of defeat and the complimenting of the abandonment of the home, family and responsibility; the destruction of basic Christian values.

What kind of a harvester should a good father be? He should first be an imitator of St. Joseph: loving leader and head of the Holy Family. A man of integrity: a promise-keeper who fulfills his vow to love his wife all of his life. A man of commitment turning his heart toward his children, for they are the ardent imitators of what he is – good or bad. Secondly, he may well be one who reflects the same characteristics offered by Carl Sandberg in describing Abraham Lincoln as a man of velvet and steel, a description that very aptly describes the Lord himself. Velvet meaning he is sensitive and caring; steel meaning he is firm and deliberate, all focused on Truth.

A woman recently sobbed of her marriage, “I just want my husband to care for me. I just want him to be sensitive to my needs.” She wanted the feel of velvet in her husband. Her emotions longed for it. No woman wants to snuggle up to a rock. No child wants to play with a stone. A woman might admire the strength of steel, but she loves the feel of velvet. To be a good husband and father, a man must balance both velvet and steel.

To minister to his family’s emotional needs, a father needs a lot of velvet. To protect his family from moral and social harm, a father needs a lot of steel.

A father of velvet cares about what happens to every member of his family. A caring father has smiles, hugs and kisses to give away. He does not stalk about the house without a word, hide his face in a newspaper, or become absorbed in television. He’s number one because of the amount of love and time he gives to his family. A father is a family leader not only in the worldly needs, but in the spiritual needs. He is not a hypocrite who only gives lip services to a balanced Christian life, but an evangelizer in promoting God in all family activities.

It is sad when a father loses his velvet touch of caring. Some fathers have all the answers even before the questions are asked, but they never listen to the hurts and the pains, the trials and the problems. They never offer guidance, only some hard fast answers.

When we lose our velvet, you can almost predict in advance what will become of the family. Children become so starved for affection that they welcome it from any source. They'll take any kind of affection they can get, wholesome or not. They resort to taking their moral guidance not from family, but from the constant pressure of peers, television, printed material and mostly from the street.

As crucial as velvet is, there must also be a certain amount of steel if the home is to be socially and morally stable. If a father is a pushover and allows his children to do whatever they want, then there is almost no respect for law and authority. Home is the most important place where time is spent. It is here where moral and spiritual values are formed, where character is built, where responsibility is groomed. Steel is important because children must respect parental authority if they are to respect any authority at all. Where there is no respect, there is no commitment. Then there is no velvet, there is no steel, only a laxity from which abandonment is not far behind.

Abandonment is not just a non-presence, but it can be a cold and indifferent presence. Many wives are widowed and children are orphaned in a world of indifference. If all we provide is food and shelter, this is not Christian, for pagans do as much. Stephen Wood, founder of "Covenant Keepers" identified another form of abandonment. He said, "Getting fathers involved in the religious education of their children has been the most difficult challenge so far. Fathers feel inadequate and don't want to demonstrate how little they know about their faith." Is this not a challenge for a father to break out of slothfulness and become an informed evangelizer?

This is who we are. Christian fathers, healers and teachers, men of velvet and steel. Being a man of steel he makes the rules perfectly clear. Being a man of velvet, when someone asks, "who loves me?", he is there to say, "I do" with a hug and a kiss. On this Father's Day we pray that God will increase our supply of velvet and steel. We pray also for those in a fatherless world, for whom we must in turn show charity and concern. Today is the day, now is the

time. How about a big hug for your dad on this, his special day, and say, "I love you, too", which is the best present of all!

*"At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him. Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."*