

## Carrying the Demons of Our Culture

Fathers' Day - Proper 7C - June 20, 2010

A clergyman walking down a country lane and sees a young farmer struggling to load hay back onto a cart after it had fallen off. "You look hot, my son," said the cleric. "Why don't you rest a moment, and I'll give you a hand." "No thanks," said the young man. "My father wouldn't like it." "Don't be silly," the minister said. "Everyone is entitled to a break. Come and have a drink of water." Again the young man protested that his father would be upset. Losing his patience, the clergyman said, "Your father must be a real slave driver. Tell me where I can find him and I'll give him a piece of my mind!" "Well," replied the young farmer, "he's under the load of hay."

Happy Fathers' Day! A moment ago we heard two readings from scripture which speak to the issue of wholeness, of restoration from brokenness and interior separation. In the passage from the letter written to the Christian congregation in Galatia, we hear these amazing words: *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."* While these words probably targeted the interpersonal or social relationships within the Galatian community, there is no reason to forbid us from thinking these words may also speak to our interior lives, to the divisions within our own souls where we have split ourselves into aspects we fully accept and acknowledge and qualities we seek to deny and reject. And in today's Gospel, we heard the story of a man, "a man of the city who had demons." Know any of those? This man, sick, wounded and out of his mind, was restored to wholeness.

Sam Keen, in his book entitled, [Fire in the Belly](#), writes the following: "Ask most any man, 'How does it feel to be a man these days? Do you feel manhood is honored, respected, celebrated?'.....Many men feel as if they are involved in a night battle in a jungle against unseen forces. Voices from the surrounding darkness shout hostile challenges: 'Men are too aggressive. Too soft. Too insensitive. Too macho. Too power-mad. Too much like little boys. Too violent. Too detached.' " The messages are mixed and confusing leaving men in an almost constant state of disease about who they are and are supposed to be. The pain in which men find themselves is born out in the statistics: men commit suicide about four times more often than women; nine out of ten prison inmates are male; and men constitute the majority of alcoholics, drug addicts, the homeless in our country. Men, in general, are in deep pain, pain resulting from how they are socialized, the messages they received in childhood about what manhood means and the continuous pressure coming from cultural messages demanding both psychological and spiritual alienation.

What are the messages little boys receive about manhood? Sam Keen: "If an anthropologist from Mars were to study Earth cultures, he would notice something very strange. Everywhere he would find a social obsession with manliness. He would find manhood is considered a chancy thing, a difficult puzzle to solve, a test to be passed. Men and women alike constantly exhort little boys to 'act like a man,' be macho, a big man, a real man, an alpha male....The cultural task of turning a boy into a man begins by the disruption of the

primal bond between mother and son." This task takes place at three levels. The first is that of normal biological and psychological development. Change in a child's relationship with his mother over time is the natural scheme of things. All children, female as well as male, are born with an innate guidance system which will lead them to move from fusion with and dependency upon their mother toward individuation and autonomy over the next 20 years. However, added to this instinctual biological program is added the second level of the program; cultural messages, messages which continuously warn little boys away from any activities, speech or behavior which may be too feminine. Every male in this room remembers learning clearly and early the worst possible insult one could receive was that of being called a sissy, wimp, girl or one of the other thousand or so pejorative names for the feminine. Psychologically, little boys internalize the pressure to split off and deny whatever may be feminine, gentle, soft, or caregiving within themselves.

The cultural task of turning a boy into a man also takes place at a third level. This third level usually involves some form of physical pain, cruelty and even mutilation. Within certain ancient and contemporary tribes, the violence and cruelty are overt and celebrated: lip piercing, filing teeth, scourgings, and genital mutilation to name a few. In North America, we have more "civilized" methods for initiating boys into the quest for manhood. Growing up in Texas it was, for me, football. We started playing organized football sometime around the first grade and we continued right on through at least high school. Football, when I played it, was not just a sport; it was a right of passage imbued with enough sanctioned violence and brutality to beat every hint of the feminine out of a young man. And what was not taken care of on the field was certainly dealt with in the locker room.

Men carry within themselves this absolute rule: the feminine and all that is related to it or resembles it in any way must be banished forever from your soul, your psyche, your thinking and your behavior. The worst thing a man can be, according to this cultural paradigm, is "feminine." I suggest this demand is too strong, too absolute, too unwilling to see the strength and wisdom in the feminine. Perhaps, because men have been taught so thoroughly to deny the feminine within themselves, we are more prone to a long list of painful demons: alcoholism and drug addiction born of a desire to flee from the pain we feel; a propensity to always approach conflicts and problems with the need to win, to dominate and conquer; a tendency to deny the pain, loneliness and alienation we carry by always putting up the front that we are powerful, macho and "in control." We are wounded and can never admit it. We desperately need and long for the loving, tender, healing love of God and yet, we fear losing our manhood, losing ourselves if we give in & become the loving, relational men we were created to be. Let today, this Fathers' Day be the day when we open the eyes of our hearts, confess our pain, alienation and woundedness, extend our arms outward and welcome the love of God who lives in and through and all around us. Let today be the day we make a new start, when we begin the journey toward loving and accepting all of who we are and were created to be. In this, we will find healing for our pain. Happy Fathers' Day!!!