

CRIBBS NOTES - June 17, 2007

There are contradictions that leave many of us stunned. In an era of medical wonders and tremendous communication technologies, disease and illnesses are rampant and we know so little about global events. We experience information overload but don't have sufficient knowledge to foster better human relations. There are religious explosions in almost every nation, spreading radical Islam, fundamentalist Christianity, Zionist Judaism, and extreme Buddhism, just to name a few. Yet, war and violence escalate out of control around the world.

On this Father's Day, we are reminded of the number of children living without a significant or meaningful, healthy relationship with their dads. Consider the following facts from the 2000 U.S. Census and the National Survey of America's Families:

- Single parents account for 27 percent of households with children under 18.
- One in two children will live in a single-parent family at some point in childhood.
- One in three children is born to unmarried parents.
- Between 1978 and 1996, the number of babies born to unmarried women per year quadrupled from 500,000 to more than two million.
- The number of single mothers increased from three million to 10 million between 1970 and 2000.
- One child out of 25 lives with neither parent.

Statistics don't tell the whole story, but they provide a snapshot into the conditions too many children are born into and remain. The absence of fathers caused by divorce, over-extended obligations, or a lack of involvement in their children's lives too often leads to a cycle of broken spirits and underdeveloped personalities. This points toward another contradiction: rapid population growth without positive relationships to assure strong, confident children.

We can do better and we must. It is not helpful to linger in a perpetual state of rehearsed missteps or wallow in self pity. There is great opportunity to make amends and heal the wounded hearts of children. This can only happen with a commitment to face ourselves with honesty and integrity. It is not unusual to make mistakes. It is not unique to place our priorities out of order. It happens. The real question is what are we doing to correct our past? Our children cannot afford for us to give up and let them go on without us.

Fatherhood is about "keeping it real." It is making sure our children and their well being are at the top of our list of things to do. Giving them time to experience our joy and share our dreams is what they crave most. Fatherhood means loving our children's mother(s) so much that it drips out of our pores. It is in that relationship our children gain a sense of security and wholeness. Even if divorced or separated, the primary human tie for children is based on their parents' interaction.

Another contradiction that confuses us is to experience verbal expressions of love, peace, and care but witness behaviors that demonstrate a gaping void of those qualities. Children call such practices hypocritical and fake. They say anyone who says one thing

but does the opposite is a phony. They lose respect for such a person. Too often that is what they see among adults. Children want honest relationships that are consistent, considerate, and caring. They want confidence in the most important people in their lives.

The axiom, "Charity begins at home and spreads abroad," properly informs and describes what is needed and required to reverse the numbers presented above. We must love and provide for our children based on our commitment to them. Use the past as a guide of lessons learned, confessions of what we have done, and inspiration to repent; never to return to flawed attitudes and behaviors. Pick up the telephone and make the most difficult call of your life. Apologize, if necessary, and take charge over your new decision to be on the best possible terms with the children who call you "Father." That would be the first and most important step toward extending radical hospitality.