

About twenty years ago, a book came out called "The Shack." It was such a popular book that a movie was made of it ten years later. The book was given to me by a friend to help me in my spiritual journey. And I saw the movie. I'm not recommending that you see the movie. But if you do, a couple of disclaimers. First of all, some theological ideas offered in the book do not coincide with our Catholic theology. Secondly, there are characters presented in a controversial and challenging way. But the movie does have two powerful scenes that tie in to today's Feast of the Most Holy Trinity.

The story focusses on Mac, the father of two young children who goes camping with his family at a nearby lake. An unspeakable tragedy happens involving his little girl, who is kidnapped, raped and in killed in a rundown shack not too far away. Several months after the tragedy, Mac receives a letter in the mailbox, which sits at the edge of the street in a mound of fresh snow. Mac notices that there are no footprints in the snow, but that the mailbox door is open, and a white envelope rests within.

The envelope has a single sheet with the simple message, "Mac, meet me at the Shack. God." Mac wrestles with the invitation and finally decides to go alone. As he arrives at the crime scene, traumatic memories and feelings boil over. He then sees a man who looks a lot like Jesus Christ, who invites Mac to his cottage for a meal. As Mac enters the cottage, he sees two other people sitting with Jesus at the table. One is called Papa, but looks like a large black woman. The other person at the table is a woman who looks like she is from India or Pakistan. She is the Holy Spirit. As the three sit and interact, Mac is impressed with the peace, joy and fraternity of the three. What a wonderful image of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity! Mac asks, "All right, which one of you is God?" All three answer: "I am!"

As the story progresses, Mac begins to relate to each of them. They help Mac come to healing, reconciliation, and peace. When Mac asks Papa why he doesn't look like God the Father, she replies, "Because you have Daddy Issues you haven't resolved yet. You can't see me as a father. But you will."

Each one of the Trinity in their own way are able to touch Mac's pain, to feel his pain, and to restore his broken relationship with God. It is a beautiful image of The Trinity all working to love us. We know the Lord is with us the whole time. That is what Mac discovers in this Trinitarian experience. He discovers that we have this most gracious God, Who relates to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I love the character in the movie, Papa. She is a very gracious and loving woman. She says repeatedly throughout the movie to Mac, "Mac, I'm especially fond of you." Any time anybody's name is mentioned, she says, "You know, I'm especially fond of that person." Mac finally says, "Is there anyone you're not especially fond of?" Then God the Father says, "Haven't found him yet."

We have this God that is especially fond of you. He is so gracious to you. God the Father is so gracious. Jesus is so gracious. The Holy Spirit is so gracious. They are all just spilling out with grace for you. God wants to welcome all of us to the table of the Lord. Ultimately, this is the table where you get to experience the graciousness of God. The kindness of God. God who is slow to anger and rich in mercy. Right here, we get to experience the love of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Reflect on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What your relationship is like with each one of them?

If you notice that one is weaker, ask God to help you grow in that. I myself feel most strongly connected to the Holy Spirit. I'm pretty good with Jesus. But I'm still working out my own Daddy Issues with the Father!

Because today is Father's Day, I share with you a comment about fatherhood written by Dr. Greg Popcak, a family counsellor and psychiatrist.

Canada made news recently for its new rules forbidding government workers from using "gender-biased" terms like "mother" and "father" when conducting official business. What used to be honorable titles for thousands of years are now considered "gender-biased." In the United States, there is a growing movement encouraging the use of "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" on birth certificates.

In this brave new world, it would seem that our culture has decided that it is well past time to proclaim motherhood and fatherhood to be indistinguishable and interchangeable. This would all be well and good if science wasn't consistently showing that fathers and mothers bring different gifts to the parenting table and that children raised in households without one or the other do not fare as well as children raised in homes with both. Fortunately, although it may no longer be politically correct to do so, it is at least still legal to celebrate Father's Day. It might be a good idea to take advantage of this freedom while it still exists, and reflect on what science says about why dads matter.

The presence of an involved, caring father significantly decreases the risk of delinquency and substance abuse in adolescent boys. Mothering gives children the ability to tolerate stress more effectively, nurturing fathers give a greater capacity to regulate aggression.

Children who have a close relationship with an involved father are twice as likely to go to college and find stable employment after high school

as those children who do not have a loving father in their lives. Together, moms' and dads' unique gifts help kids develop a full range of skills.

The science is clear. Mothers and fathers are not interchangeable, nor are they replaceable. The loss of a mother or a father is devastating, and the benefits lost by the absence of a parent of either gender simply cannot be made up for by filling that space with another caregiver of the same gender. That isn't a judgment on the nurturing skills of that same-gendered caregiver. It's just science. It turns out that Mother Nature simply doesn't care about gender politics, no matter how much progressive culture warriors try to re-educate her.

So, even if it causes our too-hip-for-science friends to scowl at us, this Father's Day, let's celebrate the uniqueness of dads and rejoice in all the ways fatherhood is a blessing to our children. I conclude with these eight thank-you notes given by children to their fathers. The children range in age from grade school to adults.

Thank you, Dad, for giving your all at work and at home.

Thank you, Dad, for making sure we have everything we need.

Thank you, Dad, for leading our family in the ways of the Lord.

Thank you, Dad, for teaching us about Jesus.

Thank you, Dad, for making our home a place we want to be.

Thank you, Dad, for showing us how to fight hard and finish well.

Thank you, Dad, for helping us up when we fall.

Thank you, Dad, for believing in us and for being our #1 fan. AMEN!

A Prayer for Father's Day

Loving God, we ask your blessings upon all fathers.

May they be inspired by your mercy, wisdom, strength and selfless love.

For new fathers with new responsibilities;

For fathers awaiting the birth of a child;

For those who are tired, facing challenges, stressed or depressed;

For those balancing work and family;

For those whose children have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities;

For those who raise their children on their own;

For those who struggle to feed their children due to poverty;

For those who are a father to the children of others;

For those who have lost a child;

For those whose desire to be a father has not been fulfilled;

For grandfathers, uncles, godfathers, and those who are like a father;

For spiritual fathers and priests;

For those who have a strained relationship or whose father is absent;

For those whose children have left home;

For fathers who have died; For those who have lost their father;

Bless all fathers, that their love may be deep; that they may be filled with the strength, courage, and perseverance needed to lead their families and to lead their children to know what is good. Through the intercession of St. Joseph, may all fathers be blessed this day and always. Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.