

12 Sunday Ordinary Time C 2016

June 18-19

Frazee/Callaway

I can think of four things that have radically impacted my identity as a person: family, ordination, the office of pastor, and canon law.

You know I grew up with ten siblings. Mother was a nurse and dad was a car dealer. I cannot think of anything more formative of my identity than this. I think I have a stronger dose of my mother's compassion than my father's ability to haggle. Parenthetically, my dad loved to negotiate and it became even a little embarrassing in his retirement. If mother sent him to get some steaks and a quart of milk, he would want to see the manager to negotiate the price. It was amazing how often he was successful. I cannot think of anything more formative of my identity than family.

To be ordained has called for a substantial adjustment to my identity. I remember the first time I tried on a clerical shirt. I was in seminary at St. John's in my third year. I closed the door to my room and locked it. Trying on the shirt, I felt like I was claiming something that wasn't mine to claim. After about ten years' priesthood, my identity was reintegrated, and I remember the day this was clear to me. I was in a hardware store and I needed help with parts for a plumbing project. I found a lady to help me. Although she was very helpful, I couldn't figure out her quirky disposition toward me. Back in my car I saw myself in the rear view mirror. I had forgotten that I was wearing a clerical shirt. A bit panicked, I replayed the whole experience, hoping I hadn't said anything that was embarrassing to the priesthood. I think I was OK!

The other things that have impacted my identity have been the office of pastor and my work as a canon lawyer.

I know I have rambled on a bit, but this really isn't about me. It is about personal identity. What are the things that have shaped your identity, your understanding of yourself?

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" "Who do you say that I am?" People thought he was John the Baptist! This is craziness. John was beheaded. He was dead. How could people have possibly thought Jesus was John? Others thought Jesus was the prophet Elijah or another of the ancient prophets. We can see how desperate people were to explain Jesus without accepting his identity. In essence, while they felt drawn to him, at the same time they wanted to define him in their own terms and, if necessary, reject him if he would not conform to their expectations.

Peter had it right even if he didn't know what it meant. Jesus was, "The Christ of God." Jesus said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

Who is Jesus? The suffering servant. The cornerstone rejected by the builders. The crucified one. The risen one.

In light of Jesus, my identity still needs to be refined. For my faith in him as savior and my relationship to him as Lord ought to be at the foundation of any answer to the question, "Who am I?" To be a son or a brother, of itself, requires no relationship with Jesus whatsoever. It is even possible to be a priest and a pastor, and, at the same time, have little faith. I can know every law of the Church and yet be completely disinterested in the cornerstone and foundation of our amazing Church—Jesus Christ. The scribes and the Pharisees mastered the law and rejected Jesus.

Who are you? You cannot know yourself without knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Do you remember when Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio was elected as Pope? He addressed the mob of people in St. Peter's Square and asked, "Who am I? I am a sinner."

From his first moment as Pope, our Holy Father Pope Francis associated his identity with that of Jesus—Francis is a sinner who needed the Son of Man, the one who must suffer greatly for the forgiveness of our sins.

I have a niece who, from a very young age, has called me not David, or Uncle David, but simply "Priest." She greets me, "Hello priest," and I respond, "Hello, baptized." She is a child of God.

My people of God, you are children of God. No matter who you think you are, no matter who people want you to be, you are first and always Children of God. Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who "were baptized into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ." You are first and always, Children of God.

Live your dignity well. Be who you are.

It's Father's Day today. To you who are fathers, Happy Father's Day. When my daddy arrived at the gate of heaven, fifteen years ago, his haggling days were over. I don't believe haggling was ever part of his identity. It was merely a hobby. At the end of every day of his adult life, he fell to his knees and leaned into his bed. He prayed the rosary for the needs of his family. He knew well the Mother of Jesus who presented his prayers to The Christ of God.

Prayer over the People:

God our Father, in our wisdom and love you made all things.
Bless these men, that they may be strengthened as Christian
fathers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth.
Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them
always with a spirit of profound respect.
Grant this through Christ our Lord.

And may almighty God bless you all, the
Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.