Daily Meditation 6-22-26

What If America Were To Have a President With No Character?

Good morning. Happy Father's Day. I'm recording this on Father's Day.

A healthy father is a wonderful gift, and I was blessed to have a healthy father. If he wasn't perfect, but who is? But he overcame strong odds to become a person of inner strength and integrity, hard work, and accomplishment.

He was raised very poor in South Chicago, and attended St. Rita High School, run by the Augustinians, the same school that Pope Leo had taught in as a young priest before he went to South America. And thanks to football, my father got a scholarship to Villanova University outside of Philadelphia, which is also the alma mater of Pope Leo, since the Augustinians ran that school as well. My father always felt a deep debt to the Augustinians, because he got mentorship from them, about what it meant to be a man, with an emphasis on conscience and ethics.

My grandfather unfortunately derived polio when he was a young man. He had his own little business of selling and repairing vacuum cleaners, and he lost that business because the rest of his life was spent in a wheelchair. My father was angry as a young man. He saw signs that said during the Depression: "Jobs available, Irish do not apply." Now, I received a letter from a high school friend of his, who is now ordained a priest, that said, "Your father was the most blankety blank angry person I've ever met in my life" when he was a teenager! He said "he must have married a hell of a woman to have produced a priest in the family."

And two events saved my father, I think, from his anger, including marrying my mother, maybe. Sports was one, and the Augustinians were another. Because in football, he was able to get rid of his anger, to invest it into playing successful football. And the Augustinians helped him to steer it as well. At college he majored in engineering, and he painted houses on the side, and sent money home to his parents and two younger brothers in Chicago. His coach at Villanova was Harry Stuhldreher, who had been a quarterback on the Notre Dame team, that was quite successful and famous, and was labeled, that team was labeled the Four Horsemen.

Now, Harry, when my dad was a junior in college, he said to my father, he got a job as head coach in the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and he said to my father, "you've got a job waiting for you after you graduate next year. I want to hire you as my assistant coach in Madison." So this was the height of the Depression, 1936-37. So it was a great

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gift to my father to have that waiting for him, a real job in a field that he really loved. So my father and mother got secretly married in college, the last year of college, because it would be against the rules if they were known to be married. And also my mother was not Catholic at the time. So it was a quiet marriage.

But when they moved to Madison and had their first baby, my dad coached for about 10 years in Wisconsin. Then he went into business in the painting and contracting business. And they, he and my mother, both loved Madison, a great place to raise a family with it being a university town and a capital city, but also filled with nature, outdoors, where people and kids could play four seasons of the year, and with many fun lakes in the city.

My dad was a tough disciplinarian, especially to the four older ones. We'd been born one year after another. I was the fourth, the middle of the family. And for example, after Sunday mass, he would often quiz us about the sermon! And if we didn't pass his test, he would set up a card table, and we had to kneel at the card table, each of us in one side of the four sides, for 40 minutes or so. And I was the youngest and smallest, so I would often fall through on the floor, I put my body, my hands, you had to hold your hands like it would not hold me, and I would fall and forward on the floor.

When I was a kid, I didn't like peas, and my father insisted we eat all the food on our plate. And so he and I had many stand-offs where I would have my mouth full of peas, and my brothers and sisters would already be out in the backyard playing, and I wouldn't swallow the peas, saying I was not allowed to leave the table without swallowing the peas.

My father had a strong ethical awareness about him. I remember him late in life, telling me that — this would be after he retired from business — that he was glad he wasn't in business anymore, because a lot of his job was submitting contracts, bids, bidding contracts on large opportunities for painting and contracting, but with the government. And they were always secret and above board. But he said later in life, he realized there was a lot of paying under the table. And he said, his conscience would really have been confused, and probably couldn't have been a businessman later in life.

Also, there was an occasion when some high school students at the Catholic High School in town entered a synagogue and did some damage there. And my father was outraged by that, even though he didn't have kids in the Catholic high school. The four of us went to public high school. But he went to the rabbi of the synagogue to apologize, and that was pretty typical of him.

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When my sister was dying, I remember her telling me a story that I had forgotten, that just before I went into high school, my father had called a family meeting. And he said, "Here's the deal: I don't make enough money to send all seven of you to college. So the boys, you have to find your own scholarships to college. I will pay for the girls' college, but not for the boys. Boys have to find their own. Because it's much easier for boys to get scholarships than it is for girls." And my sister as she was on her deathbed, remembered that as a feminist breakthrough, if you will, in her own story, that in the early 1950s, my father was thinking about girls as equal to the boys, and when it came to rights, such as going to college.

One of the most significant decisions my parents made, in parenting and being father and mother, was this: that from about sixth grade on (when I was in 6th grade), we lived in a pretty large home, not too far from the University of Wisconsin, on the west side, and we had an extra bedroom to rent out. And my parents decided to rent it out to graduate students in university who were from a foreign country. So in my high school years, I grew up next to — because one of the rooms was adjacent to mine — next to Singh. I remember in his room at night, how some amazing smells came through. And another time, we had a Venezuelan citizen there, who was proud that he was once a matador, and got gored by a bull. So he'd pull up his shirt when he met us, to show how he'd been gored by the bull!

And there was an architect, a student from Yugoslavia who was communist. And there was a Frenchman who my father threw out of the house because he made a pass at my sister. The Frenchman was the only one who he threw out of the house. And years later, when I told him I was going to France to get a Doctorate of Spirituality, he kind of criticized that, because he found this Frenchman was the one student who we had to expel.

But what it instructed me in, and I'm sure my brothers and sisters too, is the world is not all Christian, it's not all Catholic, it's not all white. And I just took that for granted during my high school years, when I was living and sharing the dining room table with these people, and their many stories.

I remember one occasion when I was senior in high school, I'd taken a speech class, and one of the classes was to give a demonstration. I got my Singh brother, because he wore a turban all the time, to show me how to create a turban, and tell me more about the meaning behind it. So for my demonstration class, I called up the most popular guy in the class, sat him down, and created this turban on his head, talking about the meaning of it, and so forth. And it went over very big with the class, and my teacher gave us props for that. Another advantage of growing up with people from another culture.

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So, these are a few stories about my father, and again, I bless him and thank him on this Father's Day, and I hope you all have good memories of your fathers as well.

Thank you. See you next week.

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