

A Family Resemblance
Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A
John 14:1-14

“You look like your father.”

People tell me that a lot these days. “You look like your father.”

When I was younger, people used to say, “You look like your mother.” And that was true – as a child, I resembled my mother.

But DNA does funny things. And now people say to me: “you look like your father.” The family resemblance is clear.

Have people told you that you look like your mom, or your dad, or your grandparent?

Family resemblances can be strong. DNA is powerful!

But it’s not just our DNA that is involved in family resemblances...

For instance, when I was a child, I started to notice that whenever my dad was doing something that required careful attention – like, when we was balancing his checkbook - he had a funny habit of sticking his tongue out to the right, and biting on his tongue.

Well, when I was a freshman in college a friend of mine came up to me after Calculus class, and he asked me, “Why do you always stick your tongue out when you are doing math?”

“I do not!” I replied.

“Yes you do,” he said.

And I realized... he was right.

Without even thinking about it, we sometimes speak like our parents, behave like our parents, stick our tongue out like our parents...

One of the most moving experiences I’ve had in recent years happened after church one day. Friends of mine were visiting my parish that Sunday. I’ve known them for 30 years. They knew my parents very well too.

That particular Sunday, in my sermon, I told a funny story about my mother. After Mass, I was

chatting with my friends who were visiting. Then a parishioner came up and said, “I just love all your stories about your mom. I wish I had had a chance to meet her before she died.”

And my friend said, “If you’ve met Michael, you’ve met his mother.” It was a very moving thing for me to hear. My mother was a far better Christian than I have ever been. But it was very moving for me to hear someone say that they could see a family resemblance between my mother and me, especially if that meant that some of her goodness could be seen in me.

I’m thinking about family resemblances, not just because it is Mother’s Day weekend, but because I think Jesus is speaking of the same reality in today’s Gospel passage.

This is a very poignant moment in the Gospel of John. It’s all happening at the Last Supper, on the night before Jesus died.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus has already washed the disciples’ feet, that humble act of loving service. Then, he told his disciples the truth – he was about to be betrayed, his death was near.

Then Jesus says to the remaining disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God, have faith in me.”

Jesus goes on to say that he is, indeed, returning to his Father in heaven, but his journey to heaven will enable him to prepare OUR place in eternity, to prepare OUR home in the Father’s heart. Jesus says, “I will come and take you with me, so that we can be together for all eternity. I am the way, the truth, the life.”

It is the apostle Philip who then asks, “Show us the Father.”

And it’s that question which enables Jesus to say: “Whoever has seen the Father has seen me.” In other words, ‘If you know me, you know the Father.’

Jesus seems a little disappointed that Philip and the others haven’t already picked up on the family resemblance!

Jesus says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father! The Father is in me, I am in him. The words I hear from him, I speak to you. The works he tells me to do, I do.”

Do you hear that?

In effect, what Jesus is saying is this:

Look at me: if you see me, you see what your heavenly Father looks like.

Listen to me: if you hear me speak, you are hearing your Heavenly Father’s voice.

Watch me: If you see the way I behave and act, that is revealing how the heavenly Father behaves and acts.

Well, Jesus – you look like your Father!
Well, Jesus – you sound like your Father!
Well, Jesus – you act like your Father!

What a family resemblance!

This is the amazing, radical, unique Christian conviction... that in the person of Jesus, we are catching a glimpse of the Father, and hearing the Father, and experiencing the Father. The invisible God becomes visible, tangible, and evident in the person of his Son. The family resemblance is so strong. If you've seen the Son, you've seen the Father.

Many people struggle – because we know that God is a spiritual reality. God is beyond our comprehension. God is invisible to our physical eyes. And that fact can, at times, make God seem distant, disconnected, hard to know.

So Jesus suggests to Philip, and to us: You want to know what God looks like and sounds like? Just look at his Son. You'll see.

That is why we need to pay so much attention to Jesus in the Gospels.

Do you want to know what your heavenly Father looks like? He looks like his son. His son... humble enough to be born in a barn... gentle enough to embrace the children... compassionate enough to hold hands with the sick... strong enough to lift up the lowly... generous enough to die on a cross... victorious enough to rise from dead. That's what God looks like. He looks like his Son.

Do you want to know what God sounds like? He sounds like his Son. His Son, who says... Blessed are the peacemakers... His son who says, if you are angry, you're as guilty as a murderer... forgive 70 times seven... your sins are forgiven... when I was hungry you fed me.... That what God sounds like. He sounds I like his Son.

Do you want to know how God acts? He acts like his Son. His Son, who feeds the multitudes, who calms the storms, who heals the sick, who speaks the truth. That's how God acts. Like his Son.

And we, the sons and daughters of God, are created in his image and likeness. Have you every thought much about that phrase? We are created in “the image and likeness of God.” In other words, there SHOULD be a very clear family resemblance connecting you, me, Jesus and the Father.

I am supposed to resemble the Father! So I should resemble Jesus!

When people see me, they should see Jesus and his Father.
When people hear me, they should hear the words of Jesus and his Father.
When people encounter me, they should find me doing the deeds of Jesus and his Father.

During these days of pandemic, during these days when our lives have been radically altered, there are many people around the world wondering: where do we find God, where do we see God, in the middle of this mess?

Here's my suggestion. The answer to that question is this: if you want to see what God is up to right now, pay attention to what God's people are up to right now.

Right now, all across the globe, Christian believers are feeding the hungry, supporting those who have lost their jobs, helping those who have hit an economic hardship.

Right now, baptized believers are checking in on their elderly neighbors, buying grocery gift cards for people they've never met, calling up folks they know who are lonely.

Right now, Christians are praying at home, immersing themselves in the scriptures, spending time with family, taking a walk to be with God in the silence.

Right now, Christians are making sure that hungry school kids get a lunch, and they're writing letters to lonely senior citizens who have to stay in their rooms. God's people are putting the needs of others before their own needs.

Right now, when others are despairing, Christians dare to be people filled with hope.

Every morning, as I leave my house and head over to my church office, I offer this brief prayer. "Lord, may every person I speak with today, may every person I email today, may every person I encounter today, see Jesus in me. Lord, may I live my life in such a way that the people who encounter me might someday say, "Gosh, you look and act and live like Jesus."

Now, THAT'S a family resemblance to rejoice in!

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