

## 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

It's always an eye-opening realization when a child first becomes aware that his father is not the superhero he thought he was. Perhaps Dad is too weak to lift a heavy item by himself, or he becomes stumped by a question on Jeopardy—but whatever may be the cause of it, every child, sooner or later, figures out that Dad's have the same weaknesses and make the same mistakes as everybody else. It's the wise father, and the "big" father who is willing to admit to his children that he is not perfect; that he is a sinner, too, and needs God's forgiveness and theirs as well.

Father's Day should not be about idolizing Dad and putting him up on a pedestal, but about giving honor to God and thanking Him that He takes weak, sinful fathers like us, and through us shapes families and nurtures children. St. Paul puts it this way in our text: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves." (2 Cor. 4:7) He is speaking about "spiritual" fathers in this verse—those God chooses to preach the "treasure" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But in addressing you, "the baptized," we can apply it also to "earthly" fathers, because God instructs such Christian fathers to proclaim Christ to their families.

We are "earthen vessels," he says. Not a very flattering description. These were pottery of the cheapest variety. Nothing elaborate, just your basic vessel or jar made of baked clay. They were utterly common and had little value. Everyone knew that eventually they were bound to break.

Fathers are like that, both "spiritual" and "earthly" fathers. Our frames are fragile. Not only do we get sick, and suffer cuts and bruises, but we wear out over time and eventually die. You and I are made of the same stuff that makes up a clay pot. We're both of the earth—dust, clay, dirt. Our hair, bones, teeth, and skin are nothing but clay. We're "clay vessels," says St. Paul.

But we have and hold within us a treasure. The Apostle Paul was highly respected not because of his skin, bones, and teeth, but because he preached the Gospel. The same is true for every "spiritual" father. All the Apostles, and every true pastor is not regarded because of who he is on the outside, but because of what comes out of his mouth—the good news of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ our Lord. An earthen clay pot is not very impressive in its looks, but if it contains something of great value, then it gains value because of what it has. Millions of fathers are receiving cards and gifts today, but the father that is truly honored by God is he who holds in his heart the treasure of Christ, and gives that treasure to his children.

Now there's a reason why fathers are nothing more than clay vessels—so that God receives the credit for anything good that a father accomplishes. If anyone came to faith in Christ through the preaching of St. Paul, it was not because of Paul—he was just a vessel of burnt clay. It was God who used this vessel to accomplish wonderful blessings. No pastor can ever take credit for any good thing accomplished in his ministry. When we truly realize that we are not superheroes, but common dust shaped into vessels—but vessels that carry Christ—then it becomes obvious that to God alone be the glory!

An earthly father whose children fear the Lord should never say, “I am to be praised, for my children are walking with Christ.” But he should daily give thanks to God that despite his sins and weaknesses God used him, as a clay vessel, to lead his children to the Lord.

If you have ever been to an art museum you have seen pieces of pottery that are absolutely beautiful. Elaborate in detail, perfect texture, wonderful colors—many of these pieces of art have no visible defects whatsoever. They are in pristine condition. Humanly speaking, one might compare Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie to these vessels. Certainly the media does. “The most beautiful parents in the world,” was the caption beneath them as they were holding their new baby girl. Not only beautiful people, they have everything going for them—wealth, fame, promising careers in acting...who wouldn’t agree that these parents aren’t truly valuable vessels to be admired? God would not, and does not agree. For a vessel that does not carry Christ to be able to give Christ to their children, has no honor with God at all. Lest you forget, this couple dishonors God not just by breaking His Commandments, for they are not married, but by living in sin and unbelief.

By contrast, Christian fathers and mothers who raise their children in the fear and love of the Lord may not, to the world, appear to be much at all, but because they have and give the treasure of Christ to their families, they are useful to God and truly a blessing to their children. Fathers...parents...do not need to be superheroes. Just the opposite, the weaknesses that are clearly seen in us, the cracks and wrinkles, the mistakes we make in raising our children, the many sins we commit day after day, all point to the obvious truth that it is by the grace of God alone that any child grows up trusting in the Lord.

Children, do not be concerned if your parents are aging...if they are often sick...if they fail, over and over, to be the kind of parents that make you proud. They are, after all, only dust...clay vessels...of no value whatsoever in and of themselves. But their value to you is priceless when they teach you to love the Lord Jesus, when they show you how He forgives you, when they lead you to His House and become, for you, Christian examples to follow.

You may have a family life that seems to be routine and boring. Money problems may abound. There may be health problems. Such is life for us clay vessels. We wear out. We are not always pretty to look at. We are bound to break. But if you have Christ in your home, you have everything—because Christ forgives families. He gives real life to tired, old clay vessels like us. He gives hope. He gives the promise of a life to come where our bodies will be perfect in every way, and where we will have no more sins and weaknesses.

That’s what’s coming to us in Christ. But for now we are, as St. Paul says, “Hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” Life for a clay pot is not easy. We’re always a blink of an eye away from breaking...away from death. Paul says, in fact, that “we are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake.” He faced death constantly. He and every “spiritual” father who faithfully preaches Christ are on Satan’s “hit list.” Satan would have every clay vessel that carries and proclaims Christ smashed into a thousand pieces.

Did this concern Paul? No. He fearlessly preached the Gospel in the face of death. And the wonder of it was, as Paul’s body died a little each day, as his clay vessel wore out, those who believed his message received life. “Death is at work in us,” he said, “but life is at work in you.” What good is an old, clay vessel that’s cracking in many places? Because of

the treasure of Christ that he had and preached, God used Paul to bring many to salvation in Jesus Christ. As he was dying, they were receiving life through his message.

You look around this congregation and what do you see? Some very unimpressive clay vessels. People with problems of varying degree. You see fathers, and mothers, who are not superheroes by any stretch. You see children, young and old, who were raised in troubled homes—every one of us was, for no home is perfect. You see earthen vessels that are cracking and wearing out.

But do you also see the treasure that we hold? You are baptized into Christ Jesus. You come here to His House to eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. You come to hear His words of life for you. You carry Christ in your bodies. You are not impressive in whom you are, but because of Christ who is in you, and whom you, thus, proclaim to your families, you are of great value and beauty to your God.

Don't worry about your cracks; about the fact that you are falling apart in places. God forgives you. He does not hold your sins and weaknesses against you. He gives you Jesus—a Treasure for you because He died for your sins and failures. He took upon Himself our clay. He covered Himself with our dust, and He died on a cross. He became broken for you. Satan shattered Him into a million pieces, and now, through His death you have life. What St. Paul said of himself and every "spiritual" father, is first and foremost true of Jesus Christ: "Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." Death worked Jesus over. He faced it head-on and He succumbed to it. And for no other reason than for your sake. If earthly fathers, whose frail bodies are always wearing out and in the process of dying each day—if they can give life to their children, and they do...then how much more does the death of Christ give us life?

Your life is not of your own making. God gave you physical life through your father and mother, and He gives you eternal life through Jesus Christ your Lord. Jesus is your true "Superhero." Yet, He willingly became weak for your sake. He willingly allowed death to overtake Him. And isn't that precisely why He is your "Superhero?" Because through His weakness, suffering, death, and rising to life again, you are, right now, a forgiven child of God with the certain hope of life in heaven forever.

Today may be Father's Day—a day to honor God for giving us the gift of our father. Though just clay vessels, God uses Christian fathers to give the treasure of Christ to their families. But more than anything else, today is the Lord' Day—the day when we gather to receive Him who gave Himself for us; who died that we might live, and who lives that we might never die. Because of Christ you are not just a cracking clay pot. You contain a treasure—the promise of eternal life—the hope of heaven. You contain Christ through whom you are and remain God's forgiven child. Amen.