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Susan Konig - June 13, 2008 2:00 P.M.

Fathers: Good, Bad, and Divine
"Thanks for not being a big, stinky jerk."

On this Father's Day weekend, I'd like to say to my beloved husband, "Thanks for not being a big, stinky jerk."

This is a tribute to fathers everywhere. When a wife and mom is complimented, we often hear sentiments like: "She's my rock — I'd be lost without her." Or: "She's Wonder Woman! How does she do it?" Or even: "She's a saint, a living breathing saint."

But when it comes to men, the praise is usually by virtue of them not stinking up the joint. Thanks for not being Eliot Spitzer — or David Paterson for that matter. Or Bill Clinton.

Or Tom Brady. Or Michael Vick. Or Jim McGreevy. Or Mrs. McGreevy.

Staying faithful, taking care of kids, and not harming animals are major plusses.

Recently, a Tanzanian woman visiting New York on a charitable mission from Africa thanked my husband for letting me assist her with her work. In her country, women have no rights and the thought of a man allowing his wife to do something she wanted to do that didn't benefit him is unheard of.

She spoke of polygamy and murderous rebels as accepted parts of daily life.

So I'm glad my husband and most of my friends' husbands are not machete-wielding polygamists who would put women and children out on the street if we didn't lug gallons and gallons of water over miles to prepare their food every day. Thanks to democracy and the founding fathers, we can hand a man a take-out menu and tell him the pizza place is on speed dial.

A truly great Father who comes to mind this weekend is a special priest who died suddenly on June 10. Father Paul Keenan was a priest in the Archdiocese of New York

who was known for being a “radio priest.” For many years, Father Paul ministered to faceless listeners on New York’s WABC and more recently on Sirius Satellite Radio.

My husband and I worked with Father Paul for almost two years and he explained to us that when he heard the vocation to become a priest, he acknowledged the fact that his lifelong dream of being in radio would probably never come to pass. When he was a boy, he used to take the shade off his bedroom lamp and use the lamp as a microphone to be deejay Paul Keenan.

As fate (and providence) would have it, Father Paul did go into radio, often working with other men of faith, like Brooklyn’s Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, talking about issues, and helping people who called the show.

I once asked Father Paul how he was able to counsel people so well when he couldn’t even see them. “You can hear it in a voice,” he said. Listening was the key to discerning a person’s desperation, depression, need for comfort.

And you could hear a special quality in Father Paul’s voice. A mellow, but authoritative, tone that brought solace, encouragement, and understanding.

Whether listeners called in with their problems or just listened to Father Paul as he spoke with a stranger, his help to thousands over the years is undeniable.

Before I knew Father Paul, he presided at a memorial service for a close friend who was killed on September 11, 2001. The church was so crowded, I couldn’t see the priest clearly but his voice soothed the family and friends who mourned the young man. At a time when there was no way of explaining the horror, Father Paul told stories about Christopher, made us laugh a little, and reassured us of a plan bigger than ourselves. I like to think that he took a small measure of the burden off the parents who had just lost their only child.

Paul Keenan’s voice and contagious belly laugh are hard to describe but something of his manner and humor certainly come across in his inspirational books. He wrote small but powerful works, like *Good News for Bad Days*, to serve others — but also, he admitted, to help himself. He often told people that their stories, lives, and words gave him strength.

He was a real human being who heard God’s call, forsook having a family of his own and, through his ministry and the media, was a father to many.

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