

The Child is Father of the Man, Father's Day Homily
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My heart leaps up when I behold
 A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
 Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

When William Wordsworth wrote this poem 200 years ago, he expressed his childlike love of Nature. Wordsworth felt that the child, being closer to the moment of birth and ultimately to God, possesses an enviable connection that adults should emulate. Wordsworth articulated that spiritual bond through his love of the beauties of the natural world, such as the rainbow.

Many poets, writers, and lyricists have used the phrase "the child is father of the man" since then. In recent decades, waves of gender revolution have evoked new interpretive meanings for Wordsworth's piece. In his day, the term "Man" was synonymous with humanity dominated by a patriarchal hierarchy. How does the meaning of the poem change if taken literally? What does it mean to men today to say that the child is father of the man?

Neuroscientists probe the mechanics of the human brain, examining physical distinctions between men and women. Medical researchers unravel our genetic markers connected to X and Y chromosomes. Psychologists theorize about our minds and the components of male and female personalities. And sociologists posit notions of nature versus nurture – how much are we a product of immutable instinct and hard wiring and how much impact do mothers, fathers, and others have on our development? These are all rational ways to improve our understanding of ourselves and who we are as males and females of the same species.

But, what if we look at non-rational ways of understanding our gender identity? If we look at the universe, where does the concept of maleness fit? Does it extend beyond mere procreation? Is there a spiritual nature of maleness?

Historically, we have had little difficulty personifying Mother Earth and Mother Nature. In Western thought, the God of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims has defined the Father construct in the religious equation. Lacking in this paradigm is a sense of balance. In ancient times, the goddess ruled over matriarchal societies, while recent millennia saw the rise of male deities and paternalistic social structures.

As the pendulum begins swinging yet again, we might seek balance between the male and female, the mother and father, the anima and animus. These last terms were employed by Carl Jung to describe those male and female archetypes that reside within all of us. Influenced by the notion of balance, of yin and yang in Taoism, Jung suggested that essential male and female traits exist within our collective unconscious.

The question then becomes, divorced of the patriarchal desire to control or to dominate through physical force, is there a transcendent essence to being a man? What is it about being a father that helps us experience a presence, a sense of belonging, beyond our mundane daily activities? And how do these male attributes reflect the wonder and mystery of all existence?

Modern men have faced the need to respect female attributes in women, and even in themselves. Along the way, traditional male ways of being have been increasingly challenged, leaving us facing the world with confused and conflicting goals and desires. How do we navigate this maelstrom; what course can we set to guide us; and how can we best prepare boys to embrace their animus as they enter manhood?

Perhaps men should consider reasserting their place in the gender landscape. We might think about identifying traits that men today could embrace as reflecting essential male qualities; qualities that fatherhood make even more fertile and connect us with that transcendent maleness of the universe.

- *Alertness* – active and assertive, we are the volcano – when we erupt, we are a mighty force of power and change
- *Boldness* – vigilant and courageous, the comet – hurtling through the unknown, we blaze trails
- *Commitment* – earnest and persistent, the mountain – timeless towers of stone, we endure and persevere
- *Devotion* – duty-bound and honorable, the sun – rising and setting without fail, we nurture through heat and light
- *Enigmatic* – reserved and wise, the iceberg – floating alone on a vast sea, we reveal a small surface with much meaning below
- *Funny* – enthusiastic and gregarious, the unexpected from an ionized atom to a super nova – challenging limits and barriers, we are the chaos of exploration and change

As a man, I can look to these traits as touchstones for my own life and for that of my son. Perhaps other men, fathers and sons alike, can use them or craft a similar list. For we are all fathers in some sense; we all can connect to our own inherent maleness; and we are all bound by the inexorable cycle of birth and death, of life and the search for meaning.

Men can empower themselves without letting power corrupt their motives. Men of the 21st century can reclaim land, not as a conquering brutes, but as a farmer cultivating a new definition of maleness in fields allowed to go fallow for too long. Modern man can proudly stand up for his beliefs, not with prideful arrogance, but with the fire of commitment and the wisdom of the ages.