

The Ungrateful Sons

A report published by Minnesota University confirmed that family members are often the first to volunteer when someone close to them requires a kidney transplant. This makes sense because organ donations from close blood relatives often stand the best chance of success. The same report also includes interviews confirming that family donors usually respond without hesitation. Unsurprisingly, close family bonds bring spontaneous generosity especially in times of crisis or need.

That's how it usually works, but not always... as demonstrated by the words of one mother who received a kidney from her daughter:

“She's a very selfish girl and not very mature in many ways... She's not used to doing things for people. She didn't think her life should be constricted in any way... She wanted a fur

coat. It really shook me up. It was unnerving... She was reluctant and unenthusiastic... She's very calculating."

And when the interviewer enquired if her daughter's attitude made her feel uncomfortable, she responds: "I'm not uncomfortable. I've put up with so much... so when she complained about the post-operative pain, I said '*I didn't tell you about my labour pains*' and that shut her up."

Of course, we only hear the mother's account, but if she is giving a true account then her daughter falls some way short of the affection and appreciation we would usually want to associate, with parent child relationships. She seems to be what was once termed a *spoilt child* and has somehow acquired an attitude of entitlement. Her mother's response suggests that in this instance the acorn didn't fall so very far from the tree. It's as if their relationship can only

be understood in transactional terms with both weighing up where the balance lies. There is no room for spontaneity or unconditional love.

This may not be the most edifying example to quote on Mothers' Day, but perhaps it can help us to think about the familiar parable of the two sons and their father.

For the way in the sons treat their father has a great deal in common with the daughter, while the father's response differs entirely from the mother in our example.

Returning briefly to the theme of last week's homily, it could be said that both sons lacked reverence for their father, by which I mean, their focus was on themselves and their hearts were cold. The younger son, eager to discover the perceived delights beyond the homestead cut himself off by demanding his inheritance while his father was still alive. The elder son, meanwhile, may have shown outer

conformity, but his resentment boiled over when his brother was welcomed back into the fold.

Both brothers behaved as if they were entitled to make demands of their father. Both lacked awareness that their life was a gift and so failed to understand that their father is not beholden to them. Which is not to say that their father loved them any the less, or that he regarded either of them as superior to the other.

Such is the lot of many a loving parent. Taken for granted, their motives manipulated, misunderstood or misrepresented by offspring who have yet to come to terms with the depth and unconditional nature of their love.

But not this weekend... Happy Mothers' Day.