

March 1, 2015 – 2nd Sunday in Lent
Parents, Love and Strength

Who do you know that rank as really great parents - and why?

(Give them 30 seconds to think about that).

I would like to share with you the stories of two fine parents, my Uncle Charles Mueller and his wife, Aunt Lenore:

Uncle Charles is 92 years old and is a kid brother of my Dad.

Aunt Lenore, his wife, was 87 years old when she died last Monday.

May she rest in peace.

They have 5 children, 6 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren.

Uncles Charles taught Physics in a Chicago public high school in a tough neighborhood.

Some of the students told him tales of woe about their family life.

Uncle Charles would tell some of his own life story.

He was the 6th of 8 children.

His Dad died when he was only 10 years old.

After high school he joined the Army Air Corps in WWII and became a navigator on a B-17 bomber.

His plane was shot down in Germany and they landed in a river.

He was captured by the Germans and put into a POW camp.

(You can read lots of stories about POW camps and how the prisoners were treated).

He was a POW survivor and was released by the end of the war.

He came home, went to college where he met his future wife, got married and had five kids of his own.

The point of telling his story to the high school students was that:

**life's events can test us, make us stronger and better,
and then we can overcome more of life's challenges.**

I wonder how many kids wound up better men and women because of his encouragement?

He was parenting with children that were not even his own!

In the summertime Uncle Charles and Aunt Lenore would pile their five kids in their station wagon and go camping all around the country. That was fun and educational with some strengthening from the camping experiences.

A little about my Aunt Lenore.

At her wake Uncles Charles said that Aunt Lenore had never said anything negative about others in all their 66 years of marriage.

Isn't that amazing!

She was a stay-at-home mom.

She sewed everything from Halloween costumes to prom dresses.

She let her three daughters watch what she was doing and learn from her.

She did not demand that of them but attracted them to be interested in learning.

When her daughters were teenagers she sent them to charm school so they would learn how to be gracious adult women.

During the homily at her funeral Mass the priest commented on her life by saying that:

**she refused to be indifferent but chose, instead,
to be connected with and concerned about others.**

Yes, they have always been church-goers, life-long Roman Catholics.

Their parental love and strength are the keys to two of today's scripture readings:

our 1st reading about Abraham in the book of Genesis and the Gospel where God the Father speaks proudly of his Son, Jesus.

About 4,000 years ago, Abraham, originally known as Abram, was called by God out of Ur, in the southeast corner of modern-day Iraq.

God told Abram to move far to the west, to modern-day Israel.

God promised him many descendants who would become a great nation.

His descendants were to be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Abram went many years without having any children at all.

However, he had many trials and tribulations, famines and wars.

It seems like all that made him even stronger, a survivor.

Still, he trusted in God ... but he complained to God.

"I'm 100 years old and Sarah is 90.

How are we to have a child like you promised?"

Finally, a son, name Isaac, is born to Abraham and Sarah.

In today's 1st reading God tests Abraham *still further*.

In an amazing act of trust and strength,

Abraham takes his only son to sacrifice him to God.

God stops Abraham and rewards him with land and descendants.

That strong Abraham became a very important person in history.

54% of the world's population today belongs to one of the major religions that flow from his descendants: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Today's Gospel continues this theme of parental love and strength.

The Father is grooming Jesus for that ultimate sacrifice and at the same time encouraging him with those uplifting words on the Mount of the Transfiguration:

"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

Strengthened by his own austere life, Jesus suffered and died on the cross.

His reward was his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection demonstrate how today's trials and tribulations can prepare *us* for the future.

This Lenten 2015 season can strengthen us for our journey with Jesus towards our ultimate objective of life everlasting in heaven.

We can garner strength from all our adversities.

We can grow stronger from the self-disciplines of Lent.

We can get strength from our time spent with the Lord in prayer.

BUT, dare we get stronger?

Then will the Father expect even more from us?

Like he did with Abraham?

Like he did with Jesus?

Possibly! But, shouldn't we expect that?

After all, since we are made in the image and likeness of God,

we are to become more and more like God: ***strong & compassionate***, helping ***others to be strong*** in the trials and tribulations of their own lives.

Today's second reading, from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, offers us further encouragement to be strong and confident:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare ***his own Son*** but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?"

Yes, we are not alone in our earthly trials and tribulations.

Like Uncle Charles, we can gain strength from what life deals to us.

We can follow in the footsteps of Abraham and Jesus.

We are being encouraged by our wise parent, God the Father.

May we all be strengthened even further by our Lenten exercises.

Those great parents you thought of at the beginning of the homily - tell them thanks for their great example!