

In the Godfather we read: “Italians have a little joke, that the world is so hard a man must have two fathers to look after him, and that’s why they have godfathers.” Well, we Germans share this view. Perhaps we have somewhat different reasons to those of these Sicilian mafia guys living in the rougher parts of the Bronx, down-town Chicago and the back streets filled with migrants, foreigners and lots of good-for-nothings, but still the basics are the same. A close friend of our maintains: You need at least 2 godfathers. One for praying and one for presents. See, it’s true everywhere not just in Elandsdraal or grander parts of Pretoria like here in Lynnwood. Life is beautiful - even if it is short and very much in danger all our way...

„The Godfather“ (Director Francis Ford Coppola) based on Mario Puzo’s book is a popular film for years. With famous actors like Marlon Brando, Al Pacino and James Caan that’s no wonder. It has a hauntingly beautiful soundtrack of trumpet and later accordion. It plays the most heart rendering music added to the most delightful scenes of rural Sicily and shows family life at its very best except for the occasional explosion or gunfight. It’s about the ups and downs in these traditional Sicilian families, many of them living in abject poverty. That’s why many, many try to make their fortunes in the promised land beyond the wide seas. These Italian stories are somewhat more dramatic than the German family sagas of Buddenbrooks (Thomas Mann) or my favourite „Der Stechlin“ (Theodor Fontane). No surprises there really, but I think they’re even more dramatic than those Afrikaans stories by F.A. Venter: Belofte Land, Geknelde Land, Offerland and Bedoelde land „en selfs ons einste Klingbergsbuch or Dedekind and Reinstorf epic can’t hold up against it for that matter. Yet the stories are very similar and have a basic pattern to: „Rags to Riches“ or „Doom to glory.“

One of the recurring themes in this film and life’s story “The Godfather” is that life is beautiful. Ah, so very beautiful! La vita è bella! And not just „Dolce vita“, but all life is good (Compare: Karel Schoeman „Hierdie lewe“). Endangered all the way, yes. Threatened most of the time, yes, yet so very good. Short yes, sometimes cut damned short by a bullet to close to our heart, daggers at night, but still so good, lovely and most beautiful too. If it harvesting tomatoes in the summer time or drinking wine on the terrace in the winter afternoon. It’s especially good on festive days like this. Family is together for the once off celebration. Even dear & sweet sister Michaela from German is there as are friends and family from far and wide. Even the grandfathers are there and a

godfather or two. There's music, there's laughter, there's good food and drink, lights are aglow and fires are burning, joy and loads of gratitude, blessings and jubilation abound. Such wonderful people - family and friends - together and both of you are bound to find out, that that's even more than even the best of friendships.

We're celebrating your engagement and that's moving you seriously on the path from friendship and some more or less casual love affair on to that even more glorious relationship called marriage and wedded life of which we know: "What God has brought together let man not pull asunder!" You might have heard it this week: SA is 6th from the bottom on the global list for divorce. Now that sure is a list I don't want us to be leading. I don't mind for being rock-bottom of that statistics. Well, we're working on getting there. Aren't we married people? Married life is a wonderful gift and miracle from paradise. Mario Puzo writes in this book of his: "Friendship is everything. Friendship is more than talent. It is more than the government. It is almost the equal of family." - Ha, you hear that? Almost equal to family, but only nearly - never quite. That's why weddings play such a prominent role in this series of 3 films and also in our lives and that of our society. It's about the very traditional even ancient, biblical and godgiven role of men and women, of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and off course grandfathers and grandmothers and grandchildren too. Not just robots, test-tube babies from the „Brave New World“ (Aldous Huxley).

And how proud are we not as parents to see our children grow up into these fathers and mothers too. We all know the Godfather gets it right, when he states: "Great men are not born great, they grow great . . ." and we also know that also: "Many young men started down a false path to their true destiny. Time and fortune usually set them aright." - and sometimes that fortune is a very good wife, somebody called Karin - or Anita - or Angelika, Monika, Irla. Even Luther experienced the truth of that. His was Katharina von Bora. He knew full well: Wedded life is one of those areas, where a man can & has to prove his worth. It's much tougher than living solitary in some ivory tower and pretending to be a saint, than living together with a wife and realising your but a poor, miserable sinner in dire need of forgiveness and grace and mercy and love and kindness: "A man who doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man." It is like a never ending story of schooling, education and growing more mature, wiser, better, holier, but the road is narrow and steep. Yes, Matthias life is an ongoing struggle. There remains a lot of

finishing-off work, sometimes rough stuff has to be shaved and cut off, sometimes that's a hurtful process for the old Adam of ours. Loads of forgiveness, mercy and loads of love are required. And also a great deal of willingness to forgive not just once or twice, but 70 x 7 times. And then there's also plenty of savvy and down-to-earth common sense necessary growing up like this together to complete adulthood and mature man- and womanhood: "You cannot say 'no' to the people you love, not often. That's the secret. And then when you do, it has to sound like a 'yes'. Or you have to make them say 'no.' You have to take time and trouble." Well, that was another quote from the God Father for good measure even if you Niebuhrs & Dedekinds don't need much more refinement on the art of diplomacy and the delicate art of communication & dialogue. You are masters at that as it is.

It's so good to have somebody love you and take good care of you as you grow old together. Not walking alone, but together, having someone to pick you up, when you are down and encouraging you when you are feeling left out or behind. Knowing there is somebody waiting only and just for you. Somebody who's willing to listen to your meanderings, respect and love you as a person and even more share your wildest dreams and most daring and lovely passions too. Somebody to grow old with. Share good and bad times with. Somebody to build memories with. You will be together for "better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; Marriage - wedded partnership of man & wife - that's a wonderful gift - truly divine it is. Part of paradise and God's most perfect design too. My dear eldest sister once said to me: „Wilhelm, you think being engaged is fun and good. Well, being married is even far better and the real thing!“ She was very right.

The living God invites his holy and sanctified people through the holy apostle St.Peter with tomorrow's watchword (16th Sunday after Trinity): ***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*** (1Pe 5:7 NIV) Well, on a day like this who has anxieties? I'm sure Matthias, yours are pretty minimal today as on most days, but parents for one have them I can assure you and grandparents too mind you. Even those people whose alarm is going off constantly in the background have some anxieties today. We know all too well, that you can't praise the day before the evening and a lot can go wrong in life. But our

real God and living Father in heaven says: Cast all your anxiety on me because I care for you: Creation, Salvation and Sanctification!

“He does this all “ out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him.” (Luther’s Explanation to the 1st Article) He invites you: Cast all your anxiety on me because I care for you! Your anxiety of getting things right, making good and lasting choices in your life and that of your beautiful bride and hopefully your own family and in all that not just gaining this world, but also the world to come - God’s kingdom of righteousness, peace and justice, love and mercy! So practice casting and don’t stop praying i.e. casting. Ask and it will be given to you... If you who are evil can give good things to your children, how much more will the living and loving God give the Holy Spirit to those, who ask him? Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name I am with them and will grant their pleas even before they ask.

The problem with the Godfather is that he thinks he’s God and can even act like him. Decide over life and death. Determine whose to live and whose to die. That’s why they’re not just criminal, but even downright idolaters and godless in that regard. The following quote goes some way to prove that: “Tom, don’t let anybody kid you. It’s all personal, every bit of business. Every piece of shit every man has to eat every day of his life is personal. They call it business. OK. But it’s personal as hell. You know where I learned that from? The Don. My old man. The Godfather. If a bolt of lightning hit a friend of his the old man would take it personal. He took my going into the Marines personal. That’s what makes him great. The Great Don. He takes everything personal Like God. He knows every feather that falls from the tail of a sparrow or however the hell it goes? Right?”

We Lutheran Christians however don’t believe that family is the supreme value or entity in the world never mind the Godfather. We believe, teach and confess unanimously, what the Lord our God has laid down as the bottom line for all generations: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, and showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

What does this mean?

“God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear His wrath and do nothing against these commandments. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should also love and trust in Him and willingly do according to His commandments.”

So as a summary for now: Forget about the Godfather, but don't forget God your Father. That's very personal. That's crucial. That's the difference between make or break, between success or failure not only of marriage, of family life, but of our entire existence. Amen.

Wilhelm Weber