

Most men become fathers by accident, some by choice, a few by social pressures and a couple by habit.

This year, nearly 100,000 fathers will become fathers of handicapped children. Did you ever wonder how fathers of handicapped children are chosen?

Somehow, I visualize God hovering over Earth, selecting his instruments for propagation with great care and deliberation. As he observes, he instructs his angels to make note in a giant ledger.

"Armstrong, Joe, son; patron saint, Matthew."

"Forrest, Edward, daughter; patron saint, Cecelia."

"Rutledge, Jim, twins; patron saint...give him Gerard. He's used to profanity."

Finally, he passes a name to an angel and smiles. "Give him a handicapped child."

The angel is curious, "Why this one, God? He's so happy."

"Exactly," smiles God. "Could I give a handicapped child a father who does not know laughter? That would be cruel."

"But has he patience?" asks the angel.

"I don't want him to have too much patience or he will drown in a sea of self-pity and despair. Once the shock and resentment wears off, he'll handle it."

"I watched him today. He has that feeling of self and independence that is so rare and so necessary in a father. You see, the child has his own world. He (the father) has to help him live in his world, that's not going to be easy."

"But, Lord, I don't think he even believes in you." God smiles. "No matter, I can fix that. This one is perfect. He has just enough selfishness."

The angel gasps, "Selfishness? Is that a virtue?"

God nods. "If he can't separate himself from the child occasionally, he'll never survive. He doesn't realize it yet, but he is to be envied. He will never take for granted a 'spoken word.' When his child says Daddy for the first time, he will be present at a miracle and know it! When he describes a sunset to his blind child, he will see it as few people ever see my creations. I will permit him to see clearly the things I see -- ignorance, cruelty, prejudice -- and allow him to rise above them. He will never be alone. I will be at his side every minute of every day of his life because he is doing my work as surely as he is here by my side."

"And what about his patron saint?" asks the angel.

God smiles. "A mirror will suffice."