

Father's Life in His Own Words - Part 14

Sun Myung Moon

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Father looking over the local missionary's shoulder at the Myungsudae Worship Hall

Boardinghouse life

I lived in a boardinghouse for seven years, but it was not because I had no money. I lived there as a way of learning more about how life was for the women. When I was cooking, I never used warm water. I just drew water from a well with a bucket. In freezing weather, my hands stuck to the bucket. With that water, I cleaned the rice and cooked it.

When I first came to Seoul, it was quite cold. The average temperature ranged from minus 17°C to minus 21°C. When I was young, that kind of weather was common. Wherever I went, I did not live like a rich person. I started from the bottom. Those were cold winter months.

I don't need many side dishes. It is almost a habit. I only need one simple, tasty, practical side dish. I always had one tasty side dish per meal. That's enough.

You can tell if someone is a novice cook or not by watching how the person uses a cutting board. I am pretty good at that - tututuck, tututuck... [Laughter]. You can easily tell whether someone has a knack for cooking by watching how he or she prepares a side dish. When I look at a woman making rice and side dishes, I can tell how much water she used and what kind of seasoning she used. With a cursory glance, I can get to know these things.

Fasting and enduring

During my school days in Seoul, at your age, I did not eat lunch. It was not because I did not have rice. To understand the hungry days of your parents, you should know the circumstances and story behind those days. You should strive to develop into dutiful sons or daughters by putting yourselves in a situation where you experience hunger and during that time repenting for not having been pious toward your parents. That's what I think.

You are closest to God when you are hungry. When you are extremely hungry, you look at people walking by as you might your mother or your sister, as people who can help you. Under those circumstances, you find you are able to comfort and embrace millions of people.

I was also asking myself whether I was qualified to eat three meals a day when we had no country of our

own. I maintained a lifestyle of going hungry for a long time. I experienced a longing for my fellow human beings when I missed food. I thought I should love my country and fellow man more than I loved food. I thought in this way as I traveled from my hometown to Seoul. When I did not eat lunch, it was not because I didn't have money. I gave money to people in need.

I fasted just as often as I ate meals. I did not have lunch until I was thirty years old. I left home when my appetite was heaviest and continued to have only two meals a day. Probably, no one has been as hungry as I have. I hear the clamor of hungry people longing for help and liberation. That makes it difficult for me to eat. Those who pursue enlightenment and an ascetic life should practice it in everyday situations.

I often fasted on my birthday. Can you celebrate your birthday without establishing a foundation of victory on an individual level, a family level, a national level, and the world level? How can you dance and do such things? You cannot. A sinner can do that only after accomplishing the responsibility God gave him. I led that kind of lifestyle.



The Myungsudae Worship Hall of the Jesus Church religion, February 27, 1941

Human kindness

I was in a position to offer tearful prayers wherever I was, so people tended to feel sympathetic toward me without knowing why. Also, wherever I went, there were many people who treated me as you do now. There were incidents where women whose families lodged in the same houses I did offered me food they had prepared for their husbands, or for holidays, before they could take it to their own rooms. They did not even know why they did it. God moved their hearts, so that He could feed me the food they had prepared with all their hearts. This happened many times. I have not forgotten about this expression of God's love even in my sleep.

I cannot forget one particular lady. Her family name was Song, and she was very poor. At the time, she was living in a rented room with her daughter. She did not have a husband. She was living off the tiny store she was running. When she came across some food to feed herself, she said her hands took it to me instead. There was a time when two churches sometimes held joint services on the banks of the Han River, on a beach that once existed near Seobingo in Southern . When lunchtime came, I could not stay in the middle of the crowd. I left the group and sat for a while on a pile of stones, thinking. At that time, the lady, Mrs. Song, brought me two slices of bread and two ice creams. I still cannot forget that. What a serious time it was. One can never forget the debt one owes.

From this, you should understand how precious it is to visit people when they are lonely. Liking people that are easy to like does mean as much. At that time, I learned that it is noble to visit and comfort people when they are going through difficulty.

Even though it is cold, remain devoted

When I was in my twenties, winters in Seoul were quite cold. The average temperature seems to have been around minus 17 degrees Centigrade. The Han River always froze in the winter then. In that kind of weather, I lived in a room without heating. I put a damask mat on the floor and slept on it. In the morning, the design on the mat would be imprinted on the cold floor. Those marks were not easily erased; they used to stay for six months. That made an impression on me that lingers in my memory.

To overcome the cold, I used to sleep with a light bulb burning under the blanket to keep myself warm. Occasionally, though, I got burned by it. I still remember that. When I think of Seoul, that experience comes to mind. Even now, when I sit in the bathtub, I recall those days.

It was as if I were a criminal; I endured a path of suffering that no one else could have. You should not forget the historical suffering of your teacher and that of God. You should keep it deep in your heart. When you meet me in heaven later, you can hug me and say, "I was aware of your sorrowful situation and tried to live up to that standard, but I was not able to do it. Please, forgive me." If you do that with a tearful, grief-stricken heart, even God will hold you and cry with you. Until such a day comes, I don't believe the day of liberation will arrive. A devoted son, even if he is living in an unheated, cold room, should remain a devoted son. You should cherish the sorrowful heart of parents whom you attend from a cold room. You must have a penitent heart for not being able to love the whole of heaven and earth. You should also know that only if you have that kind of heart will the path to Heaven be nearby.

Old clothing and ragged appearance

I did not wear clothes like those you are wearing until I was thirty. Life was like that during the Japanese occupation. We used to buy secondhand clothes that were worn-out, dirty and shiny in spots. When I wore good clothes, girls would follow me. To avoid that, I used to take untraveled, narrow streets and keep my hair unkempt. A man must lay the foundation to achieve his goals, once they are set.

I am good at knitting. I sometimes knitted a sweater by myself and socks, too. I have made socks, underpants and jackets on my own. I did a lot of research on how to live alone without a woman's help. I had determined to pursue God's will as my lifelong business even if I had to live alone. There is nothing I cannot do. I can quickly knit nice-looking hats or gloves.

The first school vacation

On the first vacation I had while studying in Seoul, I did not go home. Although other students were rushing to buy tickets to their hometowns, I solemnly stayed back alone. I notified my parents, who had been waiting for me to visit, and explained that I could not come home. Why did I do that? The path I had to follow was different from that followed by the satanic world.

When other students were going back home with their luggage, I thought, "Although I want to see my parents, I am longing for God who can save them," and I cried inside. Bearing that longing, I devoted myself to my purpose and for the sake of the nation.