**St. Joseph and Fatherhood**

by Father Gary Selin

The subject of a man’s heart, his masculinity, fatherhood, is among the most important topics today.

We are all formed by our fathers: our personal characteristics, such as the way we walk and talk, etc.

This was is true of Christ, for He received from St. Joseph the formation of His sacred humanity. Let us imagine the way He watched Joseph in the carpenter shop, in his business dealings, but most importantly, how he spoke to and treated his wife, Mary. This had a lasting impact on Jesus, who learned how to be a man from Joseph.

St. Joseph is a man’s man: silent, but strong. Not wimpy and weak TV dads such as Homer Simpson.

Single and married men today are so confused about their own masculinity. The world and Satan want so much to destroy authentic masculinity. For a large part they have succeeded.

**St. Joseph: Protector of the Holy Family**

St. Joseph was a fighter, a protector, who fought his way to Egypt, where there he protected his family from the darkness of pagan culture/religion. Joseph was the Guardian of the Redeemer.

Who is the guardian of your family? Today in the USA, the average child spends 4-6 hours in front of the TV. How much time does this child spend with his or her own father? 15 minutes of quality time. By the time the child graduates from high school, he will have spent more time in front of the television than in front of a teacher in the classroom.

A noted politician once said: “Good parents try to instill good values at the dinner table only to have at that same evening the idiot box tell the child that the parents ought to go ‘pound sand’.”

One way or another, the father is going to have to confront this problem, and not run away. This is serious: there is a battle for your child’s soul now.

Fathers, pray with children. You are the primary educator in the faith of your child. It is so important that be the spiritual leader of your family.

You also need to sacrifice time and interests for children. [tell the story of Harry Chapin, who wrote and sang “Cats in the Cradle”. Explain the lyrics of the song, as well as the sad story that he himself did not learn a lesson from the song, but instead got too involved in his music career and did not heed the pleadings of his wife to come home as spend time with his son. Harry Chapin died in a tragic car accident before he was able to get know his son.]

**St. Joseph: Married Man, Husband of Mary**

St. Joseph was a battler. He was also a lover. For us to understand “man”, we also have to under “woman”.

St. Joseph did. Mary and Joseph had a real marriage (although celibate). Two hearts never loved each other with more authentically pure and passionate love. This is hard for us to understand (since we are sinful) that the realities of love and passion can be wholly pure. But it is possible with God’s grace.

The masculine heart has troubles opening itself to others. The man is wired differently. He doesn’t spend spare time on the telephone, speaking about relationships. He is more head than heart, more goal-oriented than relationship-oriented.

That is why he needs woman, who is, really, the center of society. In fact, the level of civilization is due to the level of its womanhood: the nobler she is, the nobler he has to be to merit her love. What power!

Now every man wants a beauty to save, some woman to fight for (this is true even of celibate priests, who desire to battle and sacrifice for their spouse, the Church).

Every woman wants to be fought for, to be noticed, and loved. Each woman has a beauty to unveil. Notice how little girls put on pretty dresses to be father’s little princess; twirling around on in flowered dresses. She does this not only to capture her father’s attention but also his delight. This is so formative in a young girl’s life. It gives to her an identity of being loved and cherished.

[tell story of young girl, 8 years old, who fell asleep in the car, and woke up to feeling herself carried in her father’s arms; this gave her comfort for the rest of her life].

For both sons and daughter, when they move into pre-teens and teens, the father’s role becomes so central and critical.

The adult woman also needs this: to be loved and cherished.

Married men, you once had a goal: to get married. You have reached that goal. Is this all? Have you since moved on to others things, more goals to reach? Is there no more adventure in your marriage?

Remember, the woman has to be continuously captured, saved, loved, cherished. To do this, the man needs to open his heart to his spouse, to become vulnerable, and to express his love not only in actions, but also in words.

Single men, now is the time for you to purify your hearts, fortify yourself with prayer, prepare yourself for this vocation if God indeed is calling you to it. Share your gift with others, particularly the poor and lonely.

Intimacy takes sacrifice; it can be painful. There is an easy way out for those men who do not want to pay the price for intimacy: pornography. This is a surrogate for authentic intimacy, and is a real emasculation. It makes the lost, lonely man feel like a man without ever requiring a thing of him. He gives nothing yet takes away everything. The woman is used, seen as an object. [story of teenager who saw his father, in the middle of the night, viewing pornography on the computer; from that moment on, he could never trust his father; “if he does not love my mother and live his marriage vows?...”]

Where is the battle for beauty here? How has he laid down his life for his beloved? Or rather isn’t it a betrayal?

**The Wound**

Loneliness. This can be a sign, an effect, of the wound due to an absent, distant father in the man’s childhood (absent either physically, emotionally, or spiritually). This occurs not only in the inner city, but also in the suburbs. I think that all men in some way have a wound from their youth due to the faults of a father (alcoholic, abusive, scornful, neglectful, too busy, etc.).

Masculinity is bestowed by the father or father-figure. There is no substitute. A woman cannot give it to him, although she can enhance it in him.

Many men with these wounds constantly try to prove to themselves and to others that they have what it takes to be a man. But at the bottom of their hearts, they have doubts. Fear of failing is what drives so many men otherwise successful in the world’s eyes. They did not receive this support and confidence from their father growing up.

Thoreau one wrote: “*The mass of mean lead lives of quiet desperation.*”

Look into your hearts: do you, as a single or married man, feel that you constantly need to **earn** love, to be made worthy of admiration, because of a wound received from your own father?

It is so important that he allow this wound to be healed.

[Recall scene from movie “Field of Dreams” where Kevin Costner meets his father and asks him to play catch with him.]

Then you need to forgive him. If he has wronged you, forgive your father, whether he lives or has passed away, as much as it may hurt. It may uncover more wounds and pain, but it is necessary for healing. Love him.

This brings us, as always, to the Answer. Jesus Christ is the answer: He heals all wounds, particularly in the sacrament of Penance, where He reaches deep into your soul with the healing touch of the Holy Spirit.

[also mention prayer, Eucharist, and recapturing the graces of the sacrament of Matrimony].

Single and married men: look to Joseph, so quiet, firm, strong, manly. He in turn points us to our one, eternal God the Father.

Do you fathers remember the first time your child called your “Daddy”, “Dada”? Do you recall the joy that sprung up in your heart when you heard this word? The same is true when we say “Our Father”. Our Father loves to hear this same cry from our hearts. It makes His heart burst with joy.

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St. John the Beloved Church

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Note: the notion that each man has three desires (an adventure to live, a battle to fight, and a beauty to save) was taken from “Wild at Heart” by John Eldredge.