

Encouragement Encouragement

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Fatherhood ... Commitment and Consecration

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Recently we had the celebration, now becoming more popular, even if only for commercial reasons, of 'Fathers' Day'. Maybe it is because at this point in our History there is a realisation that we do not really treasure or respect the role of 'father.' Last month I wrote on the importance of women in the Bible, especially in the Acts of the Apostles, but curiously we do not mention the place of men for it is assumed that they obviously took a lead role. And clearly, they did. However, it is also true that the fatherhood of these men is never emphasized or stressed. We know that St. Peter was married. We know that many of the Disciples were married and by deduction women mentioned are often done so in the context of being married to 'such and such', or widows. In the Old Testament this is less so for the fatherhood is strongly emphasized as part of the Story and their function as both married men and 'Fathers'. The number of children they had, what they did, the whole lineage and history is placed under review. Indeed, we have the whole line of Jesus before his birth clearly stated. So why this reluctance to mention a Father's Rôle?

This is especially crucial today when so many households are 'single parent ones' and where children grow up with absent fathers (approx. 25 percent). But there are also complex issues of families conjoining; so many children have stepfathers and brothers and sisters and do not necessarily see their natural fathers. It would be wrong to assume that in every situation the children are disadvantaged but it is nevertheless true, and there is substantial proof of this, that many fair badly in these situations, often in spite of valiant efforts by the existing parent.

The issue however is about the nature of Fatherhood and its importance. It is interesting that throughout the Old Testament there is reference to the prophets and leaders as being the fathers of their people. Abraham is thought of as 'a father to many people',



his descendants being as many as the stars, as the Lord promised. We also have Moses, leading his people, and people like Joseph, David, Job being schooled for the role of leader, guardian and Father. And who could fail to notice Elisha's plea to Elijah as 'my father, my father'.

In the New Testament nothing could be plainer than Jesus' relationship with His Heavenly Father and in so far as He knew no other, St. Joseph was his guardian and teacher. Jesus made His prayer to the Father which to this day is a link between all Christians of any denomination. The 'Our Father' prayer is direct and reveals what authority He has. We also see Him beseeching His Father to help him in the Garden of Gethsemane and surrendering to Him on the Cross. But He also pleads for those who He has being given charge of and prays to Him often. We see a pattern of love and respect as well as obedience and shepherding guidance in Jesus' attitude to His Father. What better image is there than the father's love in the parable of the Prodigal Son.? He RUNS to greet him on his return. In these days of equality of rôles we somehow have forgotten the differences between the rôles of men and women. Each has its distinct charism and purpose. It is not just about the everyday jobs that each can share, though sometimes that is where the discussion starts and ends, it is more about the fundamental job of parenting that each does and for what reason and for what gain... The importance of a father or father figure in the development of each and every child is essential to their emotional and psychological well-being not to mention their physical welfare. If this is so how much more important is the rôle of the 'Father' in the Spiritual development of the child and indeed the family as a whole.

In a recent programme on television (TBN), Pastors spoke of the importance in family safety and life that the father fulfils and the need to be able to provide for the family. They emphasized the guarding and girding function. Guarding as in protecting from harm, advising, leading and being there for their children both girls and boys. The Rôle model is essentially one of

"The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him." Proverbs 20.7

being a teacher and guide and good example to their children. He spoke of the kind of affirmation that the children can receive from a loving father as well as, and when necessary, discipline that correct and prepare them for adult life. The girding is from the biblical girding of ones clothes (pulling them up from the waist) for battle; thus to be prepared to fight for one's children and protect them from all evils as far as it is possible.

At Baptism we become Prophets, Priest and Kings. This can be seen plainly played out in the situations of the home in the job that the father of the Family has to fulfil. A prophet speaks the word of God and in this context the father of a family has to lead the children to God and speak the appropriate words to them in the situations of doubt or uncertainty, disbelief or fear. He speaks the Truth to his children. It is a critical role and often left to schools or a Mother. The 'priesthood' in the father is fulfilled by bringing the children to God through teaching them to pray, by praying for them continuously, by and interceding for them, and by offering himself as a sacrifice. This can be both in the temporal sense of putting their needs first or in the spiritual sense of accepting their pain as his own. Finally, a father is a King. Though not fashionable the father is a head of his household. This does not mean being domineering or dictatorial but by providing for their need, guiding and at times being the leader and final decision maker where this applies.

The shortage of such models of fatherhood has resulted in the many ills of our time. The Suicide rate for young males is very high, addiction of all types is growing and not to mention other criminal activities and violence in both genders.

There are exemplary fathers and many men struggle with this rôle in a non-Christian environment which would rule out much of the above or where rôles of the parent became very blurred and unclear. This may sound almost old fashioned - but who can deny that love, guidance, care and concern is crucial to the development of healthy, strong, loving and giving children? Yes, sometimes a parent is missing through death, divorce or abandonment and the single parent often does serve to provide what has been lost: but it is often very hard to do. But should we thereby say that a father is not required because some people lovingly cope?

Finally there is another form of 'Fatherhood' and this is of the consecrated Priesthood. A priest has to fulfil the rôle assigned to him of leading his flock, shepherding and serving his people and offering sacrifice on their behalf. He is a prime intercessor. We must pray for all

our 'Fathers' of whatever type and think much about how to help them be what God intended.

Halina Holman

Pope Francis.

Nothing could better express the pride and emotion a father feels when he understands that he has handed down to his child what really matters in life, that is, a wise heart. It is a joy that rewards all the toil that overcomes every misunderstanding and heals every wound. What a beautiful perspective to have, and one that is relevant to fathers in all aspects of life, be they biological or spiritual. The key to achieving this goal — really, to parental success — is first and foremost that the father must be present be close to his wife, to share everything, joy and sorrow, hope and hardship, be close to his children as they grow: when they play and when they strive. This does not mean to be controlling, but rather to be there to guide. A second key to success is that fathers must be patient and merciful, A good father knows how to wait and knows how to forgive from the depths of his heart, He also knows how to correct with firmness: He is not a weak father, submissive and sentimental. The father who knows how to correct without humiliating is the one who knows how to protect without sparing himself.

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A Father's Love

A father is respected because

He gives his children leadership...

Appreciated because

He gives his children care...

Valued because

He gives his children time...

Loved because

He gives his children the one thing

They treasure most - himself



Papal Prayer Intentions for July

Evangelisation – Priests and their Pastoral Ministry

That priests, who experience fatigue and loneliness in their pastoral work, may find help and comfort in their intimacy with the Lord and in their friendship with their brother priests.

Feast Days in July.

3rd St. Thomas the Apostle

4th St Elizabeth of Portugal

5th St Anthony Zaccaria

6th St Maria Goretti

11th St Benedict Patron of Europe

16th Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

21st St Lawrence of Brindisi

25th St James Apostle

26th St Joachim and St Anna

30th St Peter Chrysologus

31st St Ignatius of Loyola