



The Family LifeLine

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The Role and Responsibility of Catholic Parents

By Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

“The first form of communion between persons is that born of the love of a man and a woman who decide to enter a stable union in order to build together a new family” (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007).



The Holy Family and Ours

Frankly, I don't know how Joseph and Mary did it. They possessed immense courage and enduring faith at a time of tremendous upheaval early in their marriage. They had their lives turned completely upside down and yet lovingly followed God's will for them, even without understanding the still unfolding Mystery of God's plan in salvation history, and the pivotal role they would play in it. By the witness of their lives, the Blessed Virgin and her husband personify the primary and most important vocation in family life: following the will of Christ and living in conformity to His commandments.

Catholic mothers and fathers today continue to till the soil in the Lord's vineyard following the example of the Holy Family. In and through sacramental marriage the family "is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2207).

The Role of Mothers

Mothers and fathers both have important roles to play in the domestic church, the church of the home. "In God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root [...] The dignity of woman is measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and

charity" (Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29). In other words, in God's mind from all eternity when he decided to create beings made in His image and likeness, and imbue them with life-giving love, it is within a woman's being—within her heart and soul—where His love first establishes a foundation, takes firm root, and finds a welcoming home. The spirituality of woman is rooted in the fact that she is the heart of love and through her special relationship with the Holy Spirit (as one who gives life) woman is truly the teacher of love to all humanity.

Mothers provide nurturing care of their families, teach us how to pray, encourage and nurture spiritual growth and development, and are living examples of the meaning of sacrificial, self-giving love which is the genesis and source of an authentically feminine spirituality. Through the lens of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "we see [in all motherhood] the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-sacrificing totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement" (Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 46).

The Role of Fathers

Both men and women are called upon to image God but "it is necessary that the man be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes a special debt to the woman. [...] Women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that the man—even though he shares in the parenting relationship—always remains outside the process of

pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to learn his own 'fatherhood' from the mother" (Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18).

A man becomes a man and a father by doing things that a father ought to do. In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God, a man is called upon to ensure stability and harmony within the family. He does this by exercising generous and selfless responsibility for the life conceived in the womb of the mother; by taking a more active role in, and making a more serious commitment to his children's education and prayer life, a task that he shares with his wife; by working in a job that is never the cause of division within the family but promotes and provides for its security and unity; and, most importantly, by being a living witness and example to his children of what it means to live and act as a man of God, showing his children first-hand what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and how that relationship is lived-out daily by loving the truth, goodness, and beauty of our Catholic faith.

Any man can be a daddy but it takes a real man to be a father, and the sooner we earthly fathers begin to appreciate the great gift we have been given and begin living the mission of service to our families—when we begin to make a gift of ourselves to our wives and children, and participate deeply and personally in the Fatherhood of God—the faster we will arrive at a civilisation of love and a culture of life rooted in the transforming power of the Father's endless mercy and love.

The Church of the Home

Mothers and fathers bear witness to their responsibilities by creating

a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and humility are the rule; where education in the virtues takes place, requiring mothers and fathers to teach their children self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery—the preconditions of all true freedom. Being free to love as God loves means that parents

must help their children place the interior, spiritual aspects of their lives above not only the exterior, material aspects of society but also above those instinctual urges that are particularly strong in the teen years. Christian parents, by their example, must help their children live the greatest commandments: love of God and our neighbour.

FATHERS KNOW BEST!

On 19 June, we celebrate Father's Day, honoring all dads and father-figures in our lives. FAMILY LIFE SOCIETY wants to treat you and your family* to a day out at Universal Studios Singapore. From now till Father's Day, simply share with us the best advice your dad's ever given you. It's as easy as 1, 2, 3:

- 1 'Like' Family Life Society on Facebook.
- 2 On our Facebook page, share the best advice your father has ever given you, starting with: "The best advice my father gave was:"
- 3 Get your friends to 'like' your entry and stand a better chance to win.

The best three entries chosen by Family Life Society win four tickets each to Universal Studios Singapore. Contest closes 19 June. Winners will be announced on our Facebook page on 20 June 2011.