

INTO THE BREACH

An Apostolic Exhortation to
Catholic Men, my Spiritual Sons in
the Diocese of Phoenix

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“And I sought for a man
among them who should
build up the wall and stand
in the breach before me for
the land...”

EZEKIEL 22:30

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A Call to Battle

I begin this letter with a clarion call and clear charge to you, my sons and brothers in Christ: *Men, do not hesitate to engage in the battle that is raging around you*, the battle that is wounding our children and families, the battle that is distorting the dignity of both women and men. This battle is often hidden, but the battle is real. It is primarily spiritual, but it is progressively killing the remaining Christian ethos in our society and culture, and even in our own homes.

The world is under attack by Satan, as our Lord said it would be (1 Peter 5:8-14). This battle is occurring in the Church herself, and the devastation is all too evident. Since AD 2000, 14 million Catholics have left the faith, parish religious education of children has dropped by 24%, Catholic school attendance has dropped by 19%, infant baptism has dropped by 28%, adult baptism has dropped by 31%, and sacramental Catholic marriages have dropped by 41%¹. *This is a serious breach, a gaping hole in Christ's battle lines.* While the Diocese of Phoenix has fared better than these national statistics, the losses are staggering.

One of the key reasons that the Church is faltering under the attacks of Satan is that many Catholic men have not been willing to “step into the breach” – to fill this gap that lies open and vulnerable to further attack. A large number have left the faith, and many who remain “Catholic” practice the faith timidly and are only minimally committed to passing the faith on to their children. Recent research shows that large numbers of young Catholic men are leaving the faith to become “nones” – men who have no religious affiliation. The growing losses of young Catholic men will have a devastating impact on the Church in America in the coming decades, as older men pass away and young men fail to remain and marry in the Church, accelerating the losses that have already occurred.

These facts are devastating. As our fathers, brothers, uncles, sons, and friends fall away from the Church, they fall deeper and deeper into sin, breaking their bonds with God and leaving them vulnerable to the fires of Hell. While we know that Christ welcomes back every repentant sinner, the truth is that large numbers of Catholic men are failing to keep the promises they made at their children's baptisms – promises to bring them to Christ and to raise them in the faith of the Church.

This crisis is evident in the discouragement and disengagement of Catholic men like you and me. In fact, this is precisely why I believe this

1 - Center for Applied Research into the Apostolate. Frequently Requested Church Statistics, 2014

Exhortation is needed, and it is also the reason for my hope, for God constantly overcomes evil with good. The joy of the Gospel is stronger than the sadness wrought by sin! A throw-away culture cannot withstand the new life and light that constantly radiates from Christ. So I call upon you to open your minds and hearts to Him, the Savior who strengthens you to step into the breach!

Purpose of this Exhortation

I offer this Exhortation as an *encouragement*, a *challenge*, and a *calling forth to mission* for every willing man in the Diocese of Phoenix: priests and deacons, husbands, fathers and sons, grandfathers and widowers, young men in preparation for your vocation – that is, each and every man. With this Exhortation, I want to clarify for you the nature of this mission from Christ, for which I will rely on the clear guidance of the Holy Scriptures, the Magisterium of the Church, and the example of the saints.

In this Exhortation, I will address three primary questions:

1. **What does it mean to be a Christian man?**
2. **How does a Catholic man love?**
3. **Why is fatherhood, fully understood, so crucial for every man?**

Before addressing these three basic questions, it is important to put them into proper context. In the following section, I will explain **three important contexts** that help us understand the main questions.

Context #1:

A New Apostolic Moment – The “New Evangelization”

First, a new apostolic moment is upon us at this time in the history of the Church. The Holy Spirit is bringing about what recent popes have termed the “New Evangelization.” By *evangelization*, we mean the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by all means available, such as preaching, teaching, witnessing a fruitful and faithful family life, living celibacy for the sake of God’s Kingdom, employing media and other arts placed at the service of the Gospel. And what is new? The newness of our times is this: in the West, we find ourselves in the midst of competing cultures, particularly in cities and neighborhoods where the Gospel once permeated quite deeply. Jesus Christ’s Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16-20) to go out to the whole world and share the Good News has already happened where we live! This permeation of Western culture was once so deep that in a sense, it became part of the soil, and we still stand on that soil in certain ways. It is evident in current assumptions about life, which come directly from the Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian framework; assumptions regarding “fairness”, “equality”, “virtue”, “human dignity”, “compassion”, “representative government”, “the Golden Rule”, the “Ten Commandments”, the “hospital”, the “university”, and other clearly positive developments in the history of civilization. All this is our patrimony and inheritance from our spiritual ancestors. We find ourselves standing on this rich soil, where blessings are many because the Gospel has been taught here, received in faith, and put into practice.

Yet, at the same time, termites are hard at work in this soil. Here, in the developed desert of Arizona, we know termites well. Homebuilders know that no home built in our climate is entirely immune from these hungry, subterranean insects. Likewise, no culture – deeply Christian though it may be – is immune to the corruption of half-truths and hidden sin. Many fruits of our Christian heritage still exist, but the roots below the soil are under siege. Much about our culture remains good and must be preserved, but it would be foolish to ignore the current

and growing trends that threaten the remaining good, and dangerous to risk squandering the patrimony with which we have been blessed.

The answer and only ultimate solution is the New Evangelization of which we speak. Pope St. John Paul II, with whom I was blessed to work closely for nine years and who has inspired many men, reminds us of this needed response: “There is no solution to the social question apart from the Gospel.”² With this Exhortation, I gladly make his words my own; there is no solution to our cultural decline apart from the Gospel of Jesus.

This is daunting, perhaps, but surely an adventure. In the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus tells us, “Behold, I make all things new” (21:5) – that all things old and tired, sinful and broken, are renewed in his Incarnation, death, and Resurrection. Could this possibly be true? The answer is a resounding Yes! A true Catholic man stakes his whole life on this proposition – that all is made new in Jesus Christ. Our Lord has promised that He is and will always be with us. Thus, Catholic men across the centuries have responded to the call to enter the battle, ever ancient and ever new, and I have confidence that you will respond alike to fill the breach in our time. Be confident! Be bold! Forward, *into the breach!*

Context #2:

A Field Hospital and a Battle College

In his homilies, Pope Francis has described the Church today as “a field hospital after battle” – a constant source of mercy in order to endure and overcome wounds that we all bear. The Church is also the powerful source of Truth to heal men and prepare them to battle another day for Christ. Here in Phoenix as elsewhere, the Church is finding – though must redouble its efforts to find – the paths to healing for ourselves and the means to care for others who, like us, bear the mark of the Fall in debilitating ways, whether these wounds be physical or spiritual (ad-

2- Pope St. John Paul II, “Ecclesia in America”, 3, 5.

diction to pornography, alcohol, drugs, food, broken marriages, fatherlessness, and troubled family life). Our time calls for a renewal of the Church's genius for physical and spiritual healing, given to her by the Holy Spirit. As Pope Francis says, the wounded are all around us, and "it is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal the wounds."³At the same time, the proclamation of the fullness of truth found in the Catholic Church is essential. This leads you, men, to live lives where sins do not cause festering wounds. Through Christ's mercy and truth, we are healed and revitalized for battle. In Christ's mercy and truth, we become strong in his strength, courageous with his courage, and can actually experience the *joie de guerre* of being soldiers for Christ.

Since the Church as "field hospital" after battle is an appropriate analogy, then another complementary image is appropriate for our day: the Spiritual Battle College. The Church is, and has always been, a school that prepares us for spiritual battle, where Christians are called to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6), to "put on the armor of God", and "to be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

Ever since Jesus chose the Twelve Apostles, formed them in his presence, and sent them out in his Name, He has continued to choose and form men through his Church and to send them out to the wounded. This is the meaning of the word apostle – men who are sent. With this letter, then, my sons and brothers, I urge you to heed Jesus' call and to let him form your mind and heart with the light of the Gospel for *the purpose of being sent*. That is why this letter is an *apostolic exhortation*. I am hereby exhorting you to step *into the breach* – to do the work of Christ's soldiers in the world today.

3- Interview, September 19, 2013.

Context #3:

Man and Woman are Complementary, not Competitors

The complementarity of masculinity and femininity is key to understanding how human persons image God. Without knowing and appreciating this, we cannot know ourselves or our mission as men, nor can women embrace their own vocations, confident in the Father's love.

Men and women are certainly different. Science increasingly deepens our understanding of this difference. Up until recently, we had little idea of the complex workings of hormones, chemical reactions, and the brain differences present in boys and girls, men and women, all in response to the presence of the XX or XY combination of chromosomes present at conception. For example, the significantly greater amount of *corpus callosum* (the connective nerve fibers between the two sides of the brain) in the average woman is a fascinating discovery, as is the way the male brain is typically more segmented in its functions. Studies show that on average, infant girls will look at the face of a silent adult twice as long as infant boys, more interested in the person by God's design.⁴

All these biological facts discovered by science add to our knowledge of the symphony of complementarity between man and woman, something at which we rightly wonder and in which we rejoice when we encounter the beauty of the sexual difference.

This difference is also a challenge, since misunderstanding can creep in and sin can cause us to lose respect for one another, robbing us of our

4- There are, of course, rare exceptions to the genetic rule. We are aware of the exceptions due to genetic defect or insufficient hormonal development. For example, Turner's Syndrome in girls and Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome or XXY Syndrome in boys cause situations which are very painful in the individual lives of these young men and women and their families. I pray that Catholic researchers, psychologists, and physicians would be at the forefront of studying these phenomena and providing ethical counsel, care, and support to these individuals and families.

hope for peaceful and fruitful collaboration between men and women. But this struggle between the sexes is not the fault of God's creation; it is the result of sin. Pope Francis puts it this way:

*Man and woman are the image and likeness of God. This tells us that not only is man taken in himself the image of God, not only is woman taken in herself the image of God, but also man and woman, as a couple, are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not for opposition, or for subordination, but for communion and procreation, always in the image and likeness of God.*⁵

Alongside this struggle, the rapid advance of a “gender ideology” has infected societies around the world. This ideology seeks to set aside the sexual difference created by God, to remove *male* and *female* as the normative way of understanding the human person, and in its place, to add various other “categories” of sexuality. This ideology is destructive for individuals and society, and it is a lie. It is harmful to the human person, and therefore, a false concept that we must oppose as Christians. At the same time, however, we are called to show compassion and provide help for those who experience confusion about their sexual identity. This confusion is not unexpected when the poison of secularism reaches such critical levels: “When God is forgotten, the creature itself becomes unintelligible.”⁶

The damaging impact of this “gender ideology” on individuals and society was addressed at length this year by Pope Francis:

“I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not... an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. In order to resolve the problems in their relationships,

5- Homily, June 14, 2015.

6- “Gaudium et spes”, 36.

men and women need to speak to one another more, listen to each other more, get to know one another better, love one another more. They must treat each other with respect and cooperate in friendship”.⁷

As Pope Francis reminds us all to “love one another more,” I exhort you, my sons and brothers in Jesus Christ, to embrace more deeply the beauty and richness of the sexual difference and to defend it against false ideologies.

Having now established the contexts in which to understand the questions addressed in this Exhortation, I will now respond to the above-stated questions themselves.

Question I: What does it mean to be a Catholic Man?

ECCE HOMO – BEHOLD THE MAN

Every man, particularly today, must come to a mature acceptance and understanding of what it means to be a man. This may seem obvious, but in our world, there are many distorted images and much evidence of confusion regarding what is true masculinity. We can say that for the first time in history, people have become either so confused or so arrogant as to attempt to dictate their masculinity or femininity according to their own definitions.

At one striking moment of Jesus’ trial, Pontius Pilate, with all his worldly power, presented Jesus to the crowd with the words, *Ecce homo* – Latin meaning “Here is the man!” Thinking he was merely pointing to a man from Nazareth, he failed to recognize that he was pointing to God made man – the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth – who at once is fully God and fully man, and the perfection of masculinity. Every moment of his life on earth is a revelation of the mystery of what it means to be man – that is, to be fully human and also, the model of

7- General Audience, April 15, 2015.

masculinity. Nowhere else can we find the fullness of masculinity as we do in the Son of God. Only in Jesus Christ can we find the highest display of masculine virtue and strength that we need in our personal lives and in society itself. What was visible in Christ's earthly life leads to the invisible mystery of his divine Sonship and redemptive mission. The Father sent his Son to reveal what it means to be a man, and the fullness of this revelation becomes evident on the Cross. He tells us that it was for this reason that He came into the world, that it is his earnest desire to give himself totally to us.⁸ Herein lies the fullness of masculinity; each Catholic man must be prepared to give himself completely, to charge into the breach, to engage in spiritual combat, to defend women, children, and others against the wickedness and snares of the devil!

Looking to what the secular world holds up as "manly" is in fact to look at shadows – or even at outright counterfeits – of masculinity. No athlete, no matter how many awards; no political leader, no matter the power he wields; no performer, business man, or celebrity, no matter how much adored; no physical attribute or muscle mass; no intelligence or talent; no prizes or achievements can bestow masculinity on a man. The idolatry of celebrities at this time is a particular temptation, but to build one's masculine identity on such fleeting models is to build an identity on sand. My Catholic sons and brothers, we can only build a certain foundation for masculinity on the rock, Jesus Christ. We look to our Savior to be transformed in Him, to be the men we are called to be, and to let others see Him in us.

Yet we do not merely look to Jesus. We *truly* encounter Christ at Mass when we receive the very gift of Himself in the Eucharist. For this reason, I call upon my brother priests to awaken the sense of transcendence in the hearts of men through reverent and beautiful liturgy, helping men to rediscover Jesus in the Eucharist each and every Sunday. I ask my brother priests to teach the faithful about the powerful truth of the

8- John 12:27

liturgy, especially in ways to which men can relate. Teaching men to understand the fullness and power of the Mass must be a top priority. What a joy it is for men of God when they are led by priests who have a confident sense of their own masculinity, their call to participate in Christ's spousal love, and their generous, life-giving fatherhood!

Saints, our Heroes of Faith

This is what our forefathers, the saints, have done for two millennia. As the Gospel reveals the reality of masculinity, we can also find it lived out in the heroic witness of the saints.

Saints are a kind of continuation of the Gospels and so give us examples of the varied paths of holiness. Thus, as Jesus shows us the perfection of masculinity, so we can also find it lived by the saints who were led by Christ. Just as an aspiring baseball player is inspired at the Baseball Hall of Fame, so must we men look to those who have gone before us, to look to them for inspiration and encouragement in fighting the good fight.

Think of the varied skills and talents of baseball players. A young person may dream to hit like Babe Ruth, catch and throw like Willie Mays, have the agility of Henry Aaron, the consistency and hard work of Lou Gehrig and Jackie Robinson. Young pitchers would dream of pitching like Cy Young and Randy Johnson. As they see each of these players play the game in different ways, they are inspired to a love of baseball.

Yet far greater than a ball game is what Catholic men seek. We look to the saints as to heroes, striving to live like Christ, united to Him and learning from Him at the same time. In a dramatic way to which we can relate, the saint's life says *Ecce homo!*, "Here is the man!" This is what St. Paul implies when he writes, "It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Each man should make a decision to have a patron Saint. While there are many more, I offer the names of ten saints with whom each and every

Catholic man should become familiar. Next to each saint's name is listed the virtue with which he is associated, as well as the sin which opposes that virtue. When we identify our sin and the needed virtue, we can identify which saint's intercession will be particularly helpful:

- St. Joseph (*Trust in God* – selfishness)
- St. John the Baptist (*Humility* – arrogance)
- St. Paul (*Adherence to Truth* – mediocrity)
- St. Michael the Archangel (*Obedience to God* – licentiousness and rebelliousness)
- St. Benedict (*Prayer and Devotion to God* – sloth)
- St. Francis of Assisi (*Happiness* – moralism)
- St. Thomas More (*Integrity* – double-mindedness)
- Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (*Chastity* – lust)
- St. Josemaría Escrivá (*Boldness* – worldly fear)
- Pope St. John Paul II (*Defending the Weak* – passivity)

We don't even need to look to the distant past to find heroes of the faith. We witnessed St. John Paul II forgive his would-be assassin, and after recovering his health, continue tirelessly to call the world to "open wide the doors to Christ."⁹ Time and again, he exhorted us, "Be not afraid!" Today in parts of the world where persecution rages, we are seeing courageous witnesses of truth in the recent martyrs of Syria, Nigeria, Iraq, and other war-torn countries. We remember our twenty-one Coptic brothers who, just this past winter, were beheaded on a beach in Egypt, and as Pope Francis noted, "*only because they confessed Christ.*"¹⁰

Men, we must never believe that holiness and courage are things of the past! You and I are called to a holiness that shows Christ to the world as our forefathers have done countless times throughout history, following

9- Opening mass, October 22, 1978.



10- February 2015.

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in this time of evil's growing boldness, each man must prepare himself for nothing less than martyrdom, whatever form this may take, and to instill in his children and grandchildren the willingness to do the same.

Will the Lord not continue to inspire men? Of course He will, and He continues to do so! Our concern is not *if* the Lord will give us the required strength, but *how* He is doing so *right now*. How is His Spirit moving us to rise up and reject passivity in a culture of fatherlessness? How is He now giving us interior strength in a culture of pornography? How is He now inspiring us to look beyond ourselves and our technology to the peripheries where Christ is needed? How is the Lord inspiring you and me, right now, to cast aside concerns for our own comfort, to serve our fellow man, to put out into the deep, to step into the breach?

I strongly encourage your familiarity with the lives of the saints. Just as a young baseball player would lack much having never studied the greats enshrined in Cooperstown, so we lack much if we are ignorant of the saints who have preceded us to the infinitely more glorious Halls of Heaven.

The Catholic Man's Identity

I wish now to speak to you about our identity in Christ. Most of the holy men I mentioned above lived in times quite different than our own. They had different challenges and different callings, but all had one thing in common: Jesus Christ, who gave them their true identity! Here we recall the wisdom of the Second Vatican Council: "Jesus Christ reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear."¹¹

In subtle ways, we are tempted to look elsewhere for our identity. The opinions of others, the success of our careers, the number of possessions, toys, sports, hobbies, clothing, tattoos, homes, and cars – these

11- "Gaudium et spes", 22.

are all ways that tempt us to label or identify ourselves in ways outside of Christ. While some of these must be a part of life to an extent, they are not the core of our being. Having been purchased by the blood of the Lamb, “our citizenship is in Heaven” (Phil. 3:20). The world cannot possibly give us our true identity; “Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). We must be aware of being distracted by false identities and remain grounded in Jesus Christ.

Simply put, *our identity is caught up in the identity of the eternal Son of God*. It is received at our baptism as it was clearly exclaimed at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River: “You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). When we speak of conversion, we are speaking about an acceptance of and growth into this identity. When we speak about sin, we are speaking of all that takes us away from our identity as beloved sons of the Father. Since this is our identity – being beloved sons of God the Father – is it surprising that the devil is waging a fierce battle on masculinity and fatherhood in our day? The process of Christian conversion includes coming to know God’s love and experiencing brotherhood with Christ who deepens our identity as sons of the Father in the Holy Spirit. This is our lifelong goal and our spiritual battle.

Beloved and Free Sons, Called to the Battle Within

Let us look to John the Apostle and Beloved Disciple for insights into this battle. In his first Letter to the Church, St. John speaks of the three-fold temptation faced by all of us: temptations to the passions of the flesh, to possessiveness, and to pride (1 John 2: 16-17). Are not all sins tied to these three temptations? John puts his finger on the battles that each of us must fight within ourselves. In fact, Christ fights specifically against these temptations during His encounter with Satan in the desert (Matthew 4), and then gives us instruction in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) on how we are to fight against them.

Turning away from the passions of the flesh, Jesus rejected Satan’s offering of bread in the desert, and in the Sermon on the Mount, *twice* He

instructs us to fast (Matthew 6:16). Notice that the Lord does not say “if you fast” but rather “*when* you fast.” Fasting is training in self-knowledge, a key weapon for mastery over oneself. If we do not have dominion over our passions, especially those for food and sex, we cannot possess ourselves and put the interests of others in front of our own.

Tempting Jesus to possessiveness, Satan offered Him “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” (Matthew 4:8), but once again, Jesus refused. This shows us that Christ calls us to freedom from the temptation to gain the world at the cost of our souls. Often, Satan tempts not through persons but through objects like a car, a house, or the latest high-speed technologies. There is no shortage of messages that tempt us to grasp for happiness through possessions. We recall how the Rich Young Man left his encounter with Jesus as “sad” because “he had many possessions” (Luke 18:23). Pope Francis reminds us, “The emptier the person’s heart is, the more he or she needs to buy, own, and consume.”¹² With Jesus, we are called to seek out, not to “settle for,” a simplicity of life which frees us for our mission in Christ.

In Satan’s third attack upon Jesus in the desert, the Lord was tempted to pride. Satan enticed our Lord to use his power for selfish purposes, but Jesus rejected this cross-less glory and chose the path of humility. In the Sermon on the Mount, He exhorts us to humility not once but twice when He repeats, “when you pray” (Matthew 6:5). Indeed, the greatest protection from pride and self-reliance is turning humbly to God in prayer. The new technologies of social media where we can constantly display and discuss *ourselves* can lead to a type of idolatry that consumes us. Honest prayer will keep us grounded and help us to avoid this temptation.

Men, this need for pastors to challenge men to the battle within, to the richness of a committed interior life with God, is nothing new. Listen to the words of St. John Paul II, when as Archbishop of Krakow he spoke to college students in 1962:

12- “Laudato Si”, 204.

"We are quite ready to take, or conquer, in terms of enjoyment, profit, gain and success – and even in the moral order. Then comes the question of giving, and at this point we hang back, because we are not prepared to give. The element which is so characteristic under other forms in the spiritual portrait of women is barely perceptible in men. . . . We have a tendency toward the Nicodemus type of religious attitude, toward the type of devotion which is characterized maybe only by superficial discretion but very often also by fear of what others might think. . . . This male Catholicism is not interior and deep enough; the male believer does not have a true interior life. . . . we men do not have a deep enough interior life."

The human being is a creature, and therefore in relation to God a receiver of love and courage before he or she can give it away to others. *Nemo potest dare quod non habet* is the famous term the Church developed in Latin for this fundamental truth. *You cannot give what you do not have.* Mary our Mother, the great Receiver of God's love in her very body is the model for us as Catholics, but not only Mary – *every great Saint, that is, great lover in the history of our Church.* There is no shortcut to holiness, to being the great Catholic men we are called to be. There is no short-cut past the age-old *interior fight* that each of us must engage!

As we develop in receiving God's love and mercy in prayer and sacrament, the Lord gives us sure weapons in the "good fight" St. Paul names when he writes:

"Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the Gospel of peace. In all circumstances

hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". (Ephesians 6:11-17).

We may be tempted to say, "When I get this three-fold battle behind me, I can start living the life of holiness," but this is a lie! It is precisely in the course of this fight that we become holy. As Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati said, "To live without faith, without a patrimony to defend, without a steady struggle for truth – that is not living, but existing." Are you and I merely existing? Or are we living our Christian faith as *men fully alive*? Recall the famous words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: "You were not made for comfort; you were made for greatness." Any greatness that we might merit as Catholic men depends upon this fight for holiness. It is the same fight Jesus Christ fought in the desert and the same fight our Christian forefathers fought in order to hand down the faith. Woe to us if we do not pick up the weapons of the Spirit – offered to us freely – and accept them bravely and gratefully! Courage, confidence, and humble reliance on God's infinite resources are called for here as we engage. Forward! *Into the breach!*

The Practices of a Committed Catholic Man

Given these reflections on Catholic manhood, we move to the practical, that is, how to live like a Catholic man. What practices can help us to take up our cross and follow our King?

If we think of soldiers who do not remain in strong physical and mental shape and who fail to practice the essential combat arts, we know they will not be ready for battle and will be a danger to themselves and their comrades in arms. The same is true for Catholic men; those who do not prepare and strengthen themselves for spiritual combat are incapable of filling the breach for Christ.

While there are many habits and devotions that a Catholic man can form, I charge you with keeping these seven basic practices on a daily,

weekly, and monthly basis. If these practices are not (yet) part of your life, start now!

DAILY

- 1. Pray every day.** Each Catholic man must start his day with prayer. It is said, "Until you realize that prayer is the most important thing in life, you will never have time for prayer." Without prayer, a man is like a soldier who lacks food, water, and ammunition. Set aside some time to speak with God first thing each morning. Pray the three prayers essential to the Catholic faith: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. Pray also at every meal. Before food or drink touches your lips, make the Sign of the Cross, say the "Bless us, O Lord" prayer, and end with the Sign of the Cross. Do this no matter where you are, with whom or how much you are eating. Never be shy or ashamed about praying over meals. Never deny Christ the gratitude that is due to Him. Praying as a Catholic man before every meal is a simple but powerful way to keep strong and fill the breach.
- 2. Examine your conscience before going to sleep.** Take a few moments to review the day, including both your blessings and sins. Give God thanks for blessings and ask forgiveness for sins. Say an Act of Contrition.
- 3. Go to Mass.** Despite the fact that attending weekly Mass is a Precept of the Church, only about one in three Catholic men attend Sunday Mass. For large numbers of Catholic men, their neglect to attend Mass is a grave sin, a sin that puts them in mortal danger. The Mass is a refuge in the Spiritual Battle, where Catholic men meet their King, hear His commands, and become strengthened with the Bread of Life. Every Mass is a miracle where Jesus Christ is fully present, a miracle that is the high point not only of the week, but of our entire lives on Earth. In the Mass, a man gives thanks to God for his many blessings and hears Christ send him again into the world to build the Kingdom of God. Fathers who lead their children to Mass are

helping in a very real way to ensure their eternal salvation.

4. **Read the Bible.** As St. Jerome so clearly tells us, “Ignorance of the Sacred Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” When we read God’s word, Jesus is present. Married men, read with your wife and your children. If a man’s children see him read the Scriptures, they are more likely to remain in the Faith. My brothers in Christ, this I can assure you: men who read the Bible grow in grace, wisdom, and peace.
5. **Keep the Sabbath.** From the creation of Adam and Eve, God the Father established a weekly cycle ending with the Sabbath. He gave us the Sabbath to ensure that one day out of seven we will give thanks to God, rest, and be refreshed. In the Ten Commandments, God asserts anew the importance of keeping the Sabbath. With today’s constant barrage of buying and selling and the cacophony of noisy media, the Sabbath is God’s respite from the storm. As Catholic men, you must begin, or deepen, keeping the holiness of the Sabbath. If you are married, you must lead your wives and children to do the same. Dedicate the day to rest and true recreation, and avoid work that is not necessary. Spend time with family, attend Mass, and enjoy the gift of the day.

MONTHLY

1. **Go to Confession.** At the very start of Christ’s public ministry, Jesus calls on all men to repent. Without repentance from sin, there can be no healing or forgiveness, and there will be no Heaven. Large numbers of Catholic men are in grave mortal danger, particularly given the epidemic levels of pornography consumption and the sin of masturbation. My brothers, get to Confession now! Our Lord Jesus Christ is a merciful King who will forgive those who humbly confess their sins. He will not forgive those who refuse. Open your soul to the gift of our Lord’s mercy!

- 2. Build fraternity with other Catholic men.** Catholic friendship among men has a dramatic impact on their faith lives. Men who have bonds of brotherhood with other Catholic men pray more, go to Mass and Confession more frequently, read the Scriptures more often, and are more active in the Faith. Proverbs tells us: “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (27:17). I call on each of our priests and deacons to draw men together in their parishes and to begin to rebuild a vibrant and transforming Catholic fraternity. I call on laymen to form small fellowship groups for mutual support and growth in the faith. There is no friendship like having a friend in Christ.

Question 2: How does a Catholic man love?

Now let us consider masculine love. This is not easy to do because the word *love* has almost lost its meaning in today’s society. It is a word that men have even become uncomfortable using. Why is this? What does the word now imply? A mere feeling? Something passing? A four-letter word useful for marketing and greeting cards but for little else?

Christ makes clear that central to His mission is love. “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12) He says with passion, but without a hint of sentimentality. All of our Lord’s teachings boil down to this command. Love is not a side-job; it is *the mission itself*. Yet, we can only love as we are created, and therefore, we can only love as men. So, how do men love?

For decades now, a model for manhood has been fashioned in the fictional British spy character named James Bond. Various actors have taken turns portraying this man who, in several adventures, has proposed what it means to be “manly,” yet Bond remains an enigma. Like the women that he uses in the films, the ones who watch him find themselves wanting to know him. He is never a father, nor does he accept responsibility for or love one woman. In him, we see a man whose relationships are shallow and purely utilitarian. Indeed, “James Bond is a male cha-

racter whose name is the height of irony. He is 40 years old and has no bonds. He is actually pathetic.”¹³

How different this is from Jesus Christ! Is there fear in Him? Not in the least! Who is more of a man, the one who runs away or the one who can face the responsibilities and challenges of relationships, family, and intimacy? Could a man fearful of self-gift be a true disciple of Christ? In fact, can such a man love at all?

James Bond’s name is the height of irony because he is a man with *no bonds*. Yet true masculine love will always build bonds! On the Cross and through the Eucharist, Jesus gives his very blood to bind us to Himself in love. At the Last Supper, offering us the Eucharist, His prayer to the Father is “that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:11). As He proclaims, His committed, binding love will “draw all men to himself” (John 12:32). In its Latin root, the word *religion* implies “binding together.” Thus, it is no wonder that in a culture of broken bonds, so fearful of commitment, we often hear, “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” Satan is also “spiritual, but not religious”! A man who lives life without a single, self-giving bond in his life deserves our pity, not our admiration.

In this context, I must mention what is called *machismo* and call Catholic men to rise above this tendency. The display of *machismo* attempts to seek safety in an image of toughness and emotionless living. However, it is merely a thin outer mask covering a deep inner fear of true bonds with others, bonds that come with true relationship and make one’s life rich and meaningful. Behind the mask, as any mature person can see, is a man stuck in adolescent fear of vulnerability. In most cases, he has himself been badly hurt and is repeating a cycle learned in childhood.

Instead, the true love of Christ is centered on willing the good of the other, on pouring oneself out in charity for others. This is how the Son reveals the Father’s love: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved

13- Dr. Paul Vitz, Lecture, February 21, 2015.

you...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15: 9, 12). In Christ, we see that sacrifice is at the heart of love. Only the man who has fought the interior battle of self-mastery against sterility, the man who lays down his life for others, can avoid stagnancy and self-absorption. Never doubt that this sacrifice is worth the suffering! Our Lord encourages men in saying, "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Three Masculine Loves: Friend, Husband, Father

1- A FRIEND IN CHRIST – BANDS OF BROTHERS

At the very inception of his ministry here on earth, Jesus called other men to join Him. What was He teaching us here? We see that Jesus called His disciples to Himself in such a way that they would form deep bonds of friendship and brotherhood. At the last supper, He specifically said to them, "No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what the Master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). This friendship with God is possible, a true brotherhood with Jesus, because we have the same Father. Do you, my sons, have true brothers in Christ in your life?

Throughout all of history, including the history of Christianity, important movements were spurred on by bands of brothers, friends in Christ. The Early Church Fathers St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Basil were great friends and co-workers in the defense of Christ as they stood for the truth and defeated early heresies threatening the Church. St. Benedict and his monastic companions established communities of men that preserved and furthered Western culture in the face of barbarian destruction. This veritable fortress protecting truth, goodness, and beauty was built upon the stable and rich life of Christian brotherhood and friendship. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic each started bands of brothers in service to the poor and in defense of the truth. The early founders of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier, influenced

countless other men, brought about great renewal in the Church, and evangelized to the furthest reaches of the world. In the 20th century, we see the friendship between C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and their brother “Inklings” as indispensable in the growth and flourishing of their own literary and apologetic gifts.

What is friendship? Who is a friend? The Scriptures tell us, “A friend is a friend at all times, and a brother is born for the time of adversity” (Proverbs 17:17). I am convinced that if men will seek true brotherhood, the adversities we face today will solidify bands of brothers who will be lauded in Heaven!

Therefore, men, ask yourself: what are your friends like? Do you have friends with whom you share the mission of holiness? Often young men will go to the seminary and discover the difference made by Christ-centered friendships, and their lives are transformed. This friendship is not limited to religious orders and priests. The renewal of masculinity cannot happen without banding together as brothers and true friends. In my own life, ever since my first year as a priest, I have been richly blessed by brother priests in the *Jesus Caritas Fraternity*.¹⁴ Their commitment to Eucharistic adoration and simplicity of life, their fidelity to Christ in celibacy and daily prayer, their fraternal love, wise counsel, and encouragement have richly influenced and inspired me to persevere in my own mission in Christ. It has been a joy to see how fraternity in our diocese has grown and flourished through your participation in our Men’s Conferences, Knights of Columbus, *That Man is You*, Cursillo Movement, and other such groups and events. There is room to grow, of course, but already the fruits of the Spirit are evident among these Catholic brothers and friends.

Conversely, we have seen what happens when men, young and old, do not form or sustain healthy friendships. Many, looking in the wrong places, find themselves in the false brotherhood of gangs, or without bro-

14- See Appendix for description and call to form these groups among laymen.

therhood at all, isolated and alone, and lacking these critical formative experiences of accountability and the trusted fellowship that only true friendship provides.

Studies have shown that many men today are living friendless lives.¹⁵ This has its effect on marriages where men have no emotional support apart from their wives, as well as on children, who should see true friends in the lives of their parents but often do not. What a blessing to have the presence of good faithful friends to provide the encouragement and accountability we need to be free! Indeed, as the Scriptures tell us, “as iron sharpens iron, so one man must sharpen another” (Proverbs 27:17).

2- MAN AS HUSBAND – THE PURPOSE OF MASCULINE EROTIC LOVE

Next, let us seek to understand more deeply man’s calling to spousal love. Every man is made to live as a husband and a father in *some way*: “God assigns the dignity of every woman as a task to every man.”¹⁶ Each man is called to commit and give of himself completely. For most men, this call is marriage while for others, this call is to the priesthood or to some other sincere and total self-gift in God’s service. Yet, in our day, such commitment is often seen as settling for something conventional, even boring; something that limits freedom or threatens love. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Instead, I remind you of the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá: “[T]here is a need for a crusade of manliness and purity to counteract and nullify the savage work of those who think man is a beast. And that crusade is your work.”¹⁷

15- Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038995>.

16- Pope St. John Paul II, Catechesis on Human Love, 100:6.

17- St. Josemaría Escrivá, “The Way”. Point 121.

Preparation for this sincere and complete spousal gift coincides with a man's growth into masculinity. The "single years" of a young man's life are for this formation, not a time of mere passive waiting, much less indulgence of sin. "Youth was not made for pleasure, but for heroism," says Paul Claudel, the great French Catholic playwright. I urge you, young men, to prepare for marriage even before you meet your (future) bride. Such training in sacrifice is to love your bride before you meet her, so that you may one day say, "Before I knew you, I was faithful to you."

Through spousal love, men live out a strength that endures, a strength for which the world longs, and a strength that will stabilize a crumbling society. True, this love is not free from periods of difficulties and suffering. No vocation is! However, with St. Paul, we "consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed" (Romans 8:18). There is glory in man's calling to be a husband.

When the great St. John Paul II spoke of a "spousal meaning of the body," he implied that we men are all called in some way to spousal love.¹⁸ That is, a committed love, a love that gives life, seeking the good of those to whom the man has committed. When a man is called to spousal love in marriage and family life, the priesthood, or some consecration to the Lord, he is called to a great and meaningful life. Indeed if we run from this battle because of its challenges, we will be left empty. Those who arrive at the judgment seat of God, after this life, without the scars of a sacrificing husband, will *"hold their manhoods cheap whilst any speaks who fought with us."*¹⁹

Let me now speak specifically to men called to conjugal love in marriage. This is a calling to the dignity and beauty of that union that is symbolic of Christ's spousal love for the Church. St Paul explains this relationship in his instruction to husbands, saying:

18- Pope St. John Paul II, Catechesis on Human Love, 14:5.

19- Shakespeare, Henry V.iv.3.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5: 25-32).

Marriage in Christ is not merely a human endeavor. It is higher; it is a “great mystery.” The human desire for love is, in a way, a longing for infinite and eternal love. In the Sacrament of Marriage, human love is caught up in the infinite and eternal love of God.²⁰ This is the glory, men! Called to marriage, you are called to be as Christ to your bride. Because this love unites you and your spouse sacramentally with the infinite love that Christ has for each of you, your sacramental marriage overcomes the limits of natural marriage and achieves the infinite and eternal character to which every love aspires.

Here we come to the *epicenter* of the masculine battle in our time, the nexus of life and love that is God’s gift of sexuality. The need to develop chastity in your life, my sons, cannot be emphasized enough.

While much of our culture may not fully understand or encourage this commitment, the grandeur of spousal love to which we are called, we should in no way be discouraged. Rather, consider how blessed we are to be called to proclaim this truth in a time when it is most needed. In doing so, you radiate the light of Christ in an area of society so darkened by what has always threatened spousal love. Our Catechism names them clearly: “discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and

20- “Gaudium et spes”, 48.

conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation... self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure."²¹ We could add here the use of pornography, always toxic to both the participants and the observers, and the consumptive "hook-up" subculture that removes sexual encounters entirely from the spousal relationship.

How did it come about that a culture so steadfast in supporting marriage and spousal commitment two generations ago became a culture that has reduced sexuality to mere pleasure and self-serving ends? The answer is the Sexual Revolution. For many, the Sexual Revolution promised "free love" and liberty from the shackles of old ideas about masculinity and femininity. What resulted was the separation of sexuality from the commitments of marriage and a widespread option for sterility (chemical and surgical sterilizations), amounting to a denial of what is most essentially masculine and feminine in the person. Worse, the Sexual Revolution ushered in the scourge of abortion, pornography, and sexual abuse so rampant in recent decades. Instead of real and authentic love, this false "liberty" offers cheap pleasures that mask a deeper loneliness and pain. Instead of the security of traditional family bonds, it leaves children longing for the stability of a mother's and a father's love. Instead of the freedom that comes with accepting the truth of God's design for human love between a man and woman, the Sexual Revolution has arrogantly rebelled against human nature, a nature that will never thrive in confusion and lack of self-control. Indeed, the "love" promised by the Sexual Revolution has never been found. In its wake is wreckage, countless broken hearts bound by fear of more pain, broken lives, broken homes, broken dreams and broken belief that love is even possible. This is the rotten fruit of the Sexual Revolution.

It stands to reason that if love is our deepest desire and longing, destroying love will cause us the most pain, the deepest wounds. Thus, where do we start? Where do we begin to rebuild? What do we repair first?

21- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1606.

My sons and brothers, we must begin with ourselves.

If I may return to the analogy of the athlete, we see that no champion achieves greatness without discipline in practice or without training to pursue greatness in his sport. He must be a master of himself; he must possess self-mastery. For the man called to live conjugal love, this self-mastery finds its culmination in the virtue of chastity. We need to see masculine chastity for what it is, whereas too often, this virtue is seen in negative light, as something weak. Nothing could be more false! Chastity is strength and a rejection of slavery to the passions. Christians have always believed that chastity, whether in marriage or celibacy, is a freedom from the enslavement to sin and our passions.

To understand chastity, we must understand God: "God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion."²² The love we live as men is a participation in and a demonstration of God's love. As equal sharers in dignity, women, of course, also demonstrate God's love, and yet there is a difference in how we do so. For both men and women, "Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others."²³ The virtue of chastity is the...

"...integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the

22- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2331.

23- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2332.

relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman."²⁴

Chastity allows us to master and properly live out this calling to be men of authentic communion.

Here, let me recall Jesus' crucial words regarding "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully"; he has "already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). This leads me to call specific attention to those acts that are (wrongly) considered "normal" and even encouraged for men in today's culture. Here I am speaking of pornography and masturbation. The damaging effects of these hidden and narcissistic habits train the man in a direction that is the exact opposite of love. He learns nothing more than to use others. Instead of life-giving and self-emptying love, he learns to settle for self-absorbed, sterile pleasures. Recall again Jesus' words:

"You have heard it said 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out, and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell". (Matthew 5:27-30).

With these prophetic words, Jesus foresees modern pornography that feeds the lust of the eyes. He uses hyperbole, strong words, for men to gouge out their eye and cut off their hand in order to drive home that urgent action is needed. Pornography not only leaves a man in danger of Hell, but it also destroys the bonds with his spouse, a destruction wrought like adultery. In other words, think of pornography as just as serious and no less grave than adultery. To attempt to love another person whi-

24- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2337.

le engaging in this practiced narcissism, without being transformed by mercy, will surely bring grave harm.

When battling pornographic temptations, it is important to consider honestly the factors surrounding the temptation. For most men, these include loneliness, boredom, anger, insecurity, and stress. Simply understanding the context of a temptation prompts us to invite God to send His grace to begin to overcome the devil's tactics. The Sacrament of Confession is the place of superabundant grace and support. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). This is not a promise merely to be attained in Heaven! This promise is to begin for us now, in our everyday lives. The saints attest to this truth. Through building purity of heart, men, you will not only see God in the women in your lives but also in yourselves, also the "image of God"! Even if the darkness seems insurmountable, Christ never abandons us. As a priest, I treasure the honest encounter in confession with those who want the Lord's healing. It is a blessing to work with men in the fight to turn the tide from false to real love.

Imagine with me how different our world would be for our wives, sisters, and daughters if men lived this interior strength of chastity. In our time, we hear of such high rates of sexual assaults in our society, especially on college campuses. Is this not a time for a renewal of masculine chastity? Is this not a time for men to build up the virtue of temperance through fasting and prayer amidst brothers? Is this not a time to consider more deeply St. John Paul II's proclamation that the "dignity of every woman is a task given to every man?".

Masculine chastity is a "long and exacting work" that we should be proud to undertake!²⁵ Imagine standing before the throne of God on judgment day, where the great saints of ages past, who themselves dealt with preeminent sins in their own day, will say to each other, "We dealt with the trouble of lust in our day, but those 21st century men! These

25- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2342.

happy few battled the beast up close!" We can help each other and other men around us to strive for self-mastery, as this is best addressed among brothers. I encourage you to put aside your fears and insecurities, those that keep you from engaging head on in the fight for chastity. Christ wants to help men be formed after His own heart in each confessional of the Church and at each Mass where the power of His Blood poured out on the Cross offered in Holy Communion.

3- FATHERHOOD IS ESSENTIAL

Fatherhood changes history. In the Gospel according to Matthew, where "Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers..." forty-two (42) fathers lead up to Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. In the words of St. John Paul II, fatherhood is essential to the flourishing of the world:

*"In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God (cf. Eph 3:15), a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family: he will perform this task by exercising generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother, by a more solicitous commitment to education, a task he shares with his wife (cf. Gaudium et spes, 52), by work which is never a cause of division in the family but promotes its unity and stability, and by means of the witness he gives of an adult Christian life which effectively introduces the children into the living experience of Christ and the Church."*²⁶

All men are called to fatherhood in some way:

"Becoming mothers and fathers really means to be fully realized, because it is to become similar to God. This is not said in the newspapers, it does not appear, but it is the truth of love. Becoming dad and mom

26- Pope St. John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio", 25.

*makes us more like God...you are called to remind everyone that all the baptized, even though in a different way, are called to be a father or mother".*²⁷

Like masculinity itself, perhaps fatherhood has never been a widely-pondered topic among the philosophers because it has always been presumed, its meaning fairly obvious. This is no longer true. In his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, St. John Paul II writes of the attack on fatherhood in modern society: "This is truly the key for interpreting reality [...] original sin, then, attempts to abolish fatherhood."²⁸ The great pontiff of the family points to our first parents' original act of disobedience, which cost them and us our original innocence and freedom from bodily death, and in original sin, we find a primordial rebellion against God's fatherhood, a desire to *remove fatherhood itself*. This is our enemy's underlying plan: to remove our reliance on God, the benevolent Father. To do this, Satan's primary strategy is to damage and abolish human fatherhood, in the man and relationship where each of us first glimpses what God's fatherhood might be like.

Today's attack on fatherhood, and by extension, motherhood, is multi-pronged and breathtakingly damaging. 41% of children are born into unmarried homes in our day, an increase of 700% from 1950, when the out-of-wedlock birthrate was a mere 6%. These children are not fatherless because of some sweeping physical conflict, like World War II, which caused many wounds of fatherlessness, but rather because, far worse, fathers' own willed absence is happening on a massive scale. It is not hard to see how men's fears of fatherhood find a legion of support in today's culture of self, encouraging men to flee from this beautiful gift in pursuit of their own desires. The child is forced to ask the question: "Where is my Daddy?" What then is the impact on a child's heart, on his or her understanding of the world, of love, and of the Heavenly Father,

27- Pope Francis, Address, June 15, 2015.

28- Pope St. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York: Knopf, 1994, 228.

when the answer to this question is “He left us,” or “I don’t know,” or “From the sperm bank, and he left no contact address”?

Catholic men also contribute far too regularly to this same scandal that devastates the heart of a child and makes too many women in our culture live as if they were widows! The ache of the fatherless child’s heart cries out to Heaven: “He will not ignore the supplication of the fatherless, nor the widow when she pours out her story...and the Lord will not delay, neither will He be patient with them, till He crushes the loins of the unmerciful and repays vengeance on the nations” (Sirach 35:14, 18). Why do the widows and the fatherless cry out? They have lost their protectors and providers! There is an unnatural void of the one called upon by God “to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family.”²⁹ It is because of this loss, this void caused by men’s absence, that we have always naturally, traditionally, lamented fatherlessness.

There are those in our culture today, however, who do not want us to see fatherlessness as unnatural or lamentable. Do not be fooled by those voices wishing to erase all distinctions between mothers and fathers, ignoring the complementarity that is inherent in creation itself. Men, your presence and mission in the family is irreplaceable! Step up and lovingly, patiently take up your God-given role as protector, provider, and spiritual leader of your home. A father’s role as spiritual head of the family must never be understood or undertaken as domination over others, but only as a loving leadership and a gentle guidance for those in your care. Your fatherhood, my fatherhood, in its hidden, humble way, reflects imperfectly but surely the Fatherhood of God, the Father to those whom the Lord has given us to father.

What does it mean to “father”? In a reflection on fatherhood, Pope Francis explains: “When a man does not have this desire [for fatherhood], something is missing in this man. Something is wrong. All of us, to exist,

29- “Familiaris Consortio”, 25.

to become complete, in order to be mature, we need to feel the joy of fatherhood: even those of us who are celibate. Fatherhood is giving life to others, giving life, giving life.”³⁰ This is why fatherhood – living out one’s vocation to fatherhood, whether that fatherhood is bound up in physical marriage or spiritual marriage in the priesthood or religious life – is absolutely essential for a man to live out the fullness of his meaning in life. We speak of the Church Fathers, the Desert Fathers, our pope as Holy Father, and, for good reason, our priests as “Father”.

To fully live, all men must be fathers and live out their fatherhood! We cannot “become like God,” my sons and brothers, without this understanding and this movement of the heart followed by decisive action. If you do not embrace the spousal and fatherly vocation God has planned for you, you will be stuck in the impotence of the “seed” that refuses to die and refuses to give life. Don’t settle for this half-life! The question for every man is not, “Am I called to be a father?” but rather, “What kind of father am I called to be?”

Grandfathers, You Are of Great Importance

I wish to speak a word to you who are grandfathers. Few cultures have ever expected less and shown such indifference to those like you who have battled and who have tested wisdom to offer their children and grandchildren. The world tells you that your time of influence is at an end and that it is time to retire, that is, to resign your post of fatherhood. Don’t believe it! Grandfathers matter greatly.

I have the privilege of being named after my grandfathers: Thomas Tighe Olmsted and P. James Hughes. Each in his own way fathered me alongside my own Dad. Grandpa Jim drew upon his Catholic faith to face with dignity and hope the early death of his wife, my grandmother, from cancer. Without giving into despair or self-pity, he struggled mightily to keep the family of six together and to provide for the children

30- Homily, June 26, 2013.

- the youngest of whom was my mother - during the very difficult years of the Great Depression. The memories I treasure most about Grandpa Jim were of his peaceful spirit, his Irish humor, and his sincere devotion to the Church. Grandpa Tom had an even greater impact on my life, even though he was never baptized. Beside him, I learned to care for walnut trees and watermelons, pumpkins and squash, horses and cattle, chickens and hogs. Amidst the many activities needed to make a living on our farm, I learned from Grandpa Tom and my Dad the importance of being a good neighbor, of telling the truth no matter the cost, and of having a deep respect for "Mother Nature." When I was ordained a priest, I chose a biblical saying for my First Mass card, one that captured what I had learned from my grandfathers: "This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Grandfathers, you are an essential and treasured gift to your families, and I encourage you to continue to be strong for them, to share your wisdom with them, and to fight for them. Remember Jesus' earthly grandfather, St. Joachim, who lived a life faithful to God. In his advanced years, God the Father blessed St. Joachim and his wife, St. Anne, with the great gift of Mary, our Blessed Mother. Let every grandfather be reminded that even when the routine of daily life may appear to be insignificant, we never know what great plans God has for the last years of our lives.

Hope in the Shadows of Lost Fatherhood

I would now like to say a special word to those of you, my sons, who have suffered the absence of your own father. There are many reasons why men abandon their responsibilities, or even if they remain, stay distant, as a result of the lack of positive experience of fatherhood in their own lives. This wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly fatherlessness is never God's plan. Do not give in to discouragement, however, and do not lose hope. The Church is always called to reveal God the Father. Allow Christ to show you the Father who never abandons his children, but rather offers his only begotten Son. If you have not

already done so, allow Christ to guide you in order to see your father as He sees him. Jesus will not leave you without the grace necessary to forgive and heal your father. This may happen in conjunction with the graces offered to you through your spiritual fathers, your priests, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Through your discovery of the Fatherhood of God, our loving, eternal Father, you will be witnesses to the only fatherhood that never fails.³¹

Finally, I want to offer a special word for those men who know that they have failed in their fatherhood. This is true to a greater or lesser degree in each and every one of us. This can happen through addiction, abandonment, marital conflict, emotional and spiritual detachment, failing to guide the family in faith, abortion, physical and/or emotional abuse, or the countless ways that we obscure the image of God as the loving Father. I stand with you as an imperfect father, asking God the Father to make up for the ways that we fail in this greatest of masculine missions. It is important to acknowledge the enemy's tactics; Satan will attempt to drag us down into a despair that can lead us to abandon our fatherhood even further because of our sins. Yet we must never give up, my sons! Pray and be renewed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Christ strengthens us through Confession and the Holy Eucharist to spend ourselves in rebuilding fatherhood in whatever way possible.

31- Adapted from "Evangelium Vitae", 99.

Conclusion: Sent Forth by Christ

The best friend of St. Gregory Nazianzen was St. Basil. When, as young men in their early 20s, their personal search for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith led them by separate paths to Constantinople, they soon developed a deep respect for one another. St. Gregory's description of this friendship is hopeful: "...if this is not too much for me to say, we were a rule and standard for each by which we learned the distinction between what was right and what was not."³² Their friendship inspired each to grow in virtue and freedom, to be less concerned for self and more eager to place his life at the service of others. I hope that each man reading this Exhortation will experience, if he has not already done so, the blessing of good friendships like the ones between the saints. I cannot imagine what my own life would be like without the good friends God has given me.

I hope, too, that you will take what is helpful in my message, bring it to the Lord in prayer, and go forward confidently in your vocation as men. Our life in Christ is not one of "do's and don'ts," but an adventure in authentic freedom. Embrace that freedom in order to place your life at the service of Christ, beginning in your home and radiating into the world.

32- "On St. Basil the Great," Funeral Orations (The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 22), 27.

Where is the Faith of our Fathers now?

As I write this exhortation, videos are being released documenting the barbaric practice of selling baby body parts by Planned Parenthood. Since this infamous agency receives around half a billion dollars each year from the U.S. Government, funds to carry on their slaughter of innocents, no American citizen, and certainly no man, can remain silent about this travesty of our times. We need to get off the sidelines and stand up for life on the front lines. We need faith like that of our fathers who defended the children of previous generations and who gave up their own lives rather than abandon their faith in Christ. My sons and brothers, men of the Diocese of Phoenix, we need you to step into the breach!

The Catholic martyrs of England inspired Frederick W. Faber to write the hymn “Faith of our Fathers” in AD 1849. As Faber paid tribute to the men who refused to deny Christ “in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword,” he also issued a call to arms for the men of succeeding generations. Join me in praying that we, men of the 21st century, will make the words of this verse our own:

*“Our Fathers, chained in prisons dark,
Were still in heart and conscience free:
How sweet would be their children’s fate,
If they, like them, could die for Thee!
Faith of our Fathers! Holy Faith!
We will be true to thee till death.”*

Promulgated on the Feast of the Archangels, September 29, 2015

+ Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix

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