

*men,
husbands,
fathers ...*

CALLED ^{to} _{be} HEROES

“MAN... CANNOT FULLY FIND HIMSELF EXCEPT THROUGH A SINCERE GIFT OF HIMSELF” (Gaudium et Spes 24)

THE NATURE OF MAN

MASCULINITY IS A PARTICULAR GIFT FROM GOD. IT IS SOMETHING TO BE VALUED AND USED FOR GOOD. However, many of the images of masculinity that surround us today fail to reflect this truth. Random and opportunistic sexual encounters are very different to a relationship founded in graced, creative love. The use of brute strength to gratuitously intimidate or exploit is far removed from any understanding of a man as a protector and nurturer. Indeed men who live in accord with authentic masculinity overcome their own selfishness so they are more able to act on behalf of those they are called to protect.

Jesus himself reminds us that each man is called to be self-sacrificing and to die to himself: “Unless a grain of wheat falls

into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit.” (Jn 12:24) This is an image which resonates deeply within men. The psychotherapist Philip Mango describes the innate nature of men as follows:

“A man’s identity in the natural order is to defend and protect, to be a leader, a warrior, a lover, a counselor – it’s in his nature”. Men are called to be persons who protect those who are vulnerable, particularly women and children; who respect and live out those forms of love which are appropriate to their stage and vocation in life; who embrace a life of self sacrifice on behalf of others; and who are prudent and wise guides of those who look to them for advice.

THE GOOD MAN

JOSEPH OF NAZARETH WAS A REAL MAN WHO LIVED A LIFE COMPLETELY IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS. AS THE PROTECTOR AND GUARDIAN OF JESUS AND MARY HE REVEALED HOW LOVE GOES BEYOND SEX.

Joseph was a man whose actions spoke louder than words and who constantly trusted in God despite the difficulties of the many circumstances that life threw at him: the initial humiliation of discovering that his betrothed was pregnant; the confusion following visits from angels; the forced journey to Bethlehem at the demands of a cruel imperial ruler; the desperation of not being able to properly provide for his wife in her labour; feelings of insecurity and displacement and fleeing across borders; dire warnings from angels, magi and Temple prophets, and the disappearance of the Christ child when he was twelve years old. Joseph was a man who was very familiar with the dramas of family life.

Today just like Joseph, men are subjected to various stresses and strains and often feel less in control than they would ever want to be; they too can struggle to meet the

responsibilities to family which seem so inextricably linked to being a man; they too can feel distraught for the 'lost' child or fear the humiliation that looms from being a limited provider or an inadequate guardian. But St Joseph shows the way ahead for every Christian man: trust in God and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He reveals to every man, husband and father how they can become more like the man that God wants them to be.

All men in one way or another belong also to the world of work. Men can use their talents along with the gifts of creation, to mould and culturally enrich the world in which they live. Work is not merely an incidental activity for men. Jesus often referred to the world of work in his parables: he spoke of shepherds, farmers, fisherman, merchants, labourers, and householders. Through and in his work every Christian man is expected to give of his best. While at the workbench with his foster father, Jesus too experienced what it meant to be a man engaged in human work. In a special way, he blessed work and took it up into the mystery of the self-sacrificing story that we now know as the Christ event.

ST JOSEPH is a 'model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies; he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things – it is enough to have the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic'.¹

Pope Paul VI



THE STATUE THAT COMMEMORATES THE MEN who died on the Titanic gives us a glimpse of how manly courage can manifest itself. Seventy-four percent of women on board the Titanic survived, but 80 percent of men perished. Why? Because most of those men followed the principle of "women and children first". The inscription on the Titanic Women's Memorial in Washington DC, erected by women in 1931 reads:



TO THE BRAVE MEN WHO PERISHED IN THE WRECK OF THE TITANIC, APRIL 15, 1912. THEY GAVE THEIR LIVES THAT WOMEN AND CHILDREN MIGHT BE SAVED.

THE SON OF MAN

THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST TEACHES US MUCH ABOUT HOW TO BE A MAN WHO LIVES HIS LIFE COURAGEOUSLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS. While we know that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, the uniqueness of his being has often caused us to draw on imagery to more properly understand who he is. We envisage him as the suffering servant, the Lamb of God, the Son of Man, the teacher and the Messiah. But he is also masculine and the archetype of the self-sacrificing hero. Jesus first leaves the safe world of his family at twelve and willingly 'goes about his Father's business'. He is rejected and abandoned by many of his own friends. He confronts the enemies that beset him and refuses to be deflected from his task. He shows us how to face danger and death without flinching. Most especially, Jesus reveals how being a man is really about living a life of self-sacrifice and service to others. He challenges every man to pray regularly, to be willing to give more than he receives and to always look for ways to assist those in need.

Jesus also shows men how to be brave and to submit

themselves to the will of God. As the Lion of Judah he uses a whip to dispatch the thieves from the Temple and courageously calls the Pharisees and Scribes to account. But as the Lamb of God he also cries at the grave of his friend Lazarus and struggles under the burden of his Gethsemane agony. These are the acts of the Son of God but they are also the acts of a man. They remind Christian men that they too are called to be courageous and sometimes heroic in how they live their lives, to be honest and frank in their dealings with the world and to be prepared to grieve when it is time to grieve. The life of Jesus of Nazareth also reminds men of the importance of being watchful. When confronted in the Garden of Olives with the reality of his pending passion and execution, Jesus fought the strong temptation to remove himself and through prayer agreed to submit to the will of his Father. "Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this reason that I have come to this hour". (Jn 12:27) Here Jesus reminds every man of the importance of prayer and that until death overtakes him, none can be sure of the strength of his resolve to always hold to that which is good and true.



THE GOOD MAN WORKS FOR WHAT IS JUST AND TRUE:

'Each of them will be a shelter from the wind, a retreat from the rain. They will be like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a great rock in a thirsty land...the noble man plans noble things and by noble things he stands'. (Is 32:2,8)



THE CHALLENGES FOR MEN

ALL MEN TODAY AND YOUNG MEN IN PARTICULAR, NEED TO GUARD AGAINST BECOMING PHYSICALLY SOFT AND OVERLY ACCUSTOMED TO INDULGENCE AND PLEASURE. This is because it is clear that such indulgence undermines their masculinity and does not make them happy. They intuitively sense that it is not what 'being a man' is all about. The increasing blurring of sexual difference and the promotion of a hypersexualised culture that esteems casual sex and further divorces the sexual act from its procreative role have further confused men and left them searching. Pornography in particular is enormously destructive of the integrity of men and of their capacity to live a life of service to others. Many continue to struggle as husbands and fathers because they regularly indulge in pornography. It is a scourge which

ultimately destroys a man's chance for happiness.

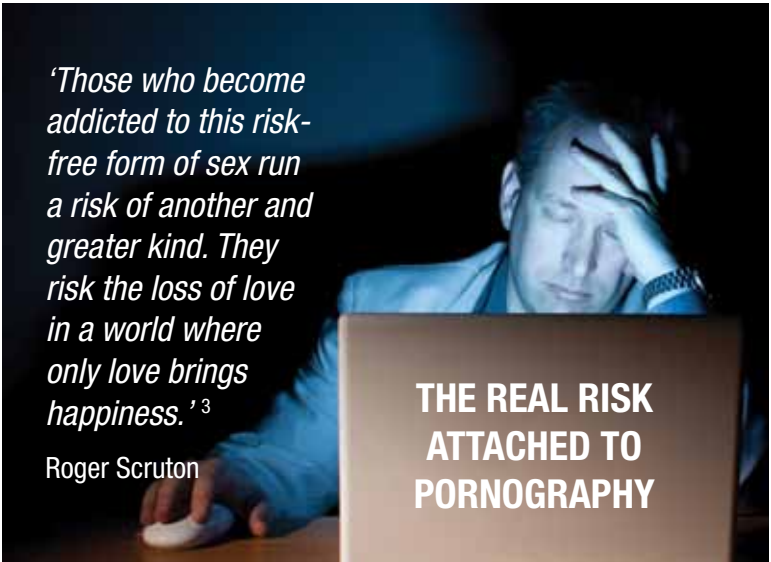
All men want to be able to respond to a challenge and do not sustain interest in activities that are easy. They need to follow the example of Christ. By facing adversity and not flinching and by working for the good of others men can truly begin to flourish. They also need to be encouraged to follow the example of St Joseph and devote themselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary and choose to be generous fathers and chaste guardians. Men also need to be challenged to live a life in Christ by sacrificing themselves for the good of spouse, family and community. Most importantly every man needs to be reminded to commit himself daily to that great work which God has ordained for him, whether that be within the ordinary or the extraordinary, and to remember that with regular prayer and the grace of God all things are possible.

Modern culture 'celebrates youth and independence, not as a transient stage en route to adulthood but as the 'time of our lives'... and an ethos that lacks transcendent aspirations and asks of us no devotion to family, God or country, encouraging us simply to soak up the pleasures of the present'.²

Leon Kass

'Those who become addicted to this risk-free form of sex run a risk of another and greater kind. They risk the loss of love in a world where only love brings happiness.'³

Roger Scruton



THE REAL RISK ATTACHED TO PORNOGRAPHY

FURTHER READING

Guardian of the Redeemer by John Paul II
Wild at Heart by John Eldredge
Young Men Rise Up by Fr Ken Barker MGL
From Wild Man to Wise Man by Fr Richard Rohr OFM

FOR THOSE STRUGGLING WITH PORNOGRAPHY

RECLAIM (Catholic recovery program)
www.reclaimsexualhealth.com

REFERENCES

- ¹ Discourse, 19 March 1969.
- ² "The End of Courtship", 1997. <http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001154.cfm>
- ³ "On the Abuse of Sex", lecture at the Witherspoon Institute, Princeton, NJ, December 2008.
- ⁴ *To Be A Father: 200 Promises that will transform You, your Marriage and your Family.* Spence, 2006.

SOME PROMISES TO START WITH ...

I PROMISE MY

GOD: I will endeavour to make my work a prayer.

WIFE: I will love you always and cherish the intimacy that is unique to us.

CHILDREN: I will communicate by word and deed my love and my high moral expectations of you.

FRIENDS: I will seek to give back more than I receive, knowing that I never can.

COMMUNITY: I will assist those in need and not make comfort a central goal in my life.⁴

Stephen Gabriel