

# The Domestic Church

A Journal of Catholic Family Spirituality + Vol. VIII, No. 3, 2003

## *Of the Father's Love Begotten*

Of the Father's love begotten  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the source, the ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore.

Let the heights of heav'n adore him;  
Angel hosts, his praises sing  
Pow'rs, dominions, bow before him  
And extol our God and King.  
Let no tongue on earth be silent,  
Ev'ry voice in concert ring  
Evermore and evermore.

Christ, to thee, with God the Father,  
And, O Holy Ghost, to thee  
Hymn and chant and height thanksgiving  
And unwearied praises be:  
Honor, glory, and dominion,  
And eternal victory  
Evermore and evermore! Amen

Text: Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348-413 AD



# Spiritual Fatherhood

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

Nine years ago, my life was changed forever. When my wife Colleen and I were married, we made a permanent decision to love; to give ourselves to each other freely and completely. In doing this, we entered into a profound and intimate relationship; we became a one-flesh covenant in communion with Christ through the gift of sacramental grace.

The life-giving bond that Colleen and I share is so powerful and so real that we had to give that love names: Claire, Angela, Benjamin, and Sophia. Children are the result of the central act of sacrifice and worship between a husband and wife, namely, the union of their bodies in the conjugal act, which mirrors the total gift of self by the Eucharistic Christ to his Church. Together, the married couple forms a lifelong, self-donating, and indissoluble union of love: a "communion of persons intended to bear witness on earth and to image the intimate communion of persons within the Trinity" (William E. May, *Marriage: The Rock on Which the Family is Built*, 65).

Marriage and, indeed, all the sacraments, tell us something about who God is. Marriage, in fact, reflects the reality that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of one divine nature, essence, and substance, for Scripture tell us: "God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27), and again "this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was

taken out of Man.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24). In creating husbands and wives, God has made two things very clear: first, that the one-flesh union between a husband and wife reflects His own divine image and likeness, and second, the fact that husbands and wives are truly equal does not mean they are the same person or have the same role in the marriage.

We must sacrifice everything: our bodies, our desires and wills, our hopes and dreams; everything we have and everything we are for the sake of our wives and children.

We can understand the role of husbands and fathers within marriage by correctly interpreting chapter five of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, particularly verses 22-24:

"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body . . . As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands."

St. Paul is saying that wives should put themselves under the mission of their husbands. What is the mission of the husband? Verse 25: to "love your wives as Christ loved the Church." How did Christ love the Church? He gave himself up for her; he died for her. Jesus tells us, 'I came into the world not to be served but to serve' and to lay down my life for my bride. "The husband's headship in the family derives from the fact that he is the chief servant" (Christopher West, audio tape, "Sacramentality of Marriage"). Our role as husbands and fathers necessarily means that we must sacrifice everything: our bodies, our desires and wills, our hopes and dreams; everything we have and everything we are for the sake of our wives and children. Living our fatherhood by the example of Christ on the Cross is what separates the boys from the men: what separates the men who are merely "daddies" from the real men who are truly fathers.

Our spiritual fatherhood is truly authentic when it is "centered in Jesus Christ and through him to the Trinity" (Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 17). Jesus, in the Gospel of John, confirms this authentic spirituality when he said to His disciples "I am the way, the truth and

the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). To be authentically spiritual, then, means that we must enter into the life of Christ and, through God's grace and the Holy Spirit, transform our hearts, minds and wills to that of Christ's. It is only through Christ that we can receive salvation and any spirituality that is truly genuine must be Christocentric and Trinitarian at its very core. Lumen Gentium, the Vatican II document on the Church, states it this way: "The followers of Christ . . . have been made sons of God in the baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified" (Lumen Gentium, n.40).

Hence, it is only through an authentic spirituality of fatherhood, a spirituality that imitates Christ; that meditates on God's Word and responds to that Word in faith and, through the Holy Spirit, makes us share in the Triune life, that we can foster and nurture growth in holiness. The more we act under God's spirit, the more we seek to know and to do God's holy will in our lives, the more we implore the assistance and grace of the Holy Spirit, the more we grow in holiness. The Lord Jesus is the quintessential model of holiness and by following His perfect example, we grow in our love of God, our families and ourselves.

The Most Blessed Sacrament is the source of spiritual fatherhood because the Eucharist is Jesus Christ. It is not a symbol or representation of Christ, but the reality of God with whom we are in intimate relationship: a relationship which "draws the faithful and sets them aflame with Christ's insistent love" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, n.10). The Eucharist, therefore, is the fountain where we receive the strength, power, and grace to seek the Lord in faith, hope, and love. The

Eucharist is the beginning of spiritual fatherhood and "is for the soul the most certain means of remaining united to Jesus" (Abbot Columba Marmion, O.S.B., Christ the Life of the Soul: Spiritual Conferences, 261). It is a deepening of the relationship which began in Baptism and realizes a level of intimacy which is inherently supernatural and mysterious, yet inexhaustive. In the reception of the Eucharist, we literally become one

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with God in a way that is purposeful and real. It is the "fount" from which flows the definition of who we are as men in terms of our relationship with Christ. By receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we

become more of who we already are in Christ "who maintains and increases the Divine life in us" (Marmion, 263).

Strengthened by the Eucharist, fathers should personify and exude faith, that is, they should exhibit a clear awareness that the work of the Church is, first and foremost, God's work. Therefore, we should foster on-going growth in faith and personal formation, which must include daily prayer, so that our spirituality is firmly grounded in the Trinity and the Catholic faith.

Spiritual fathers must be aware of the influence of secular thought and culture, with its disordered values, ideologies, and disintegrated view of the human person, and its profound influence within and upon our children today. Many of our teenagers and young adults are struggling to hold on to the Catholic belief in absolute and objective truth. Many, because they have been poorly catechized in the faith, plummet down the slippery precipice of subjective and relativistic "truth"; of societal norms that place themselves as the center of all reality and truth.

This view is in direct contrast to the life and mission of Jesus Christ and is, therefore, the antithesis of the life and mission of the Church. Solid faith formation within the family must occur and operate within the context of faith and Church, so that, as the domestic church, we are continually molded into the image of Christ for the purpose of salvation. Pride of place must be given to a systematic approach to disseminating the teachings of the Catholic Church--firmly rooted in the foundational truths of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and grace as revealed to us in Sacred Scripture, passed down through Sacred Tradition, and protected by the Magisterium--that

makes Jesus Christ come alive in the hearts of our youth (cf. Luke 24:32).

To this end, the chief servant of the family must nurture an atmosphere of inclusion in all aspects of family and parish life so that even the young persons, "who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God, are made sharers in their particular way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and have their own part to play in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world" (CCC, 896). The youth should participate fully in the evangelizing and sanctifying activity of the domestic church as well as the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, the renewal of the social order in the spirit of the gospel, and the pastoral ministry of the parish.

In addition, the sacramental dimension of family life must be encouraged in young people. The home must embody a spirituality that enhances and promotes devotion and active participation in the Eucharist where "grace is channeled into us and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their goal, are most powerfully achieved" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, n.10). This must be accompanied by a deeper appreciation and understanding of the reality of sin and the need for frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

All of this must be fostered in the home, the domestic Church and foundation of the parish community, where education in the fundamental truths of the faith are nurtured, fostered, and ensconced through family prayer, e.g. rosaries, Eucharistic Adoration, weekly attendance at Mass, recitation of the

Liturgy of the Hours, and Scripture study. Families, led by truly spiritual fathers, are a special witness to God's loving plan in the world and the breeding ground for future generations of Catholic men and women. Hence, the domestic Church, while always remaining faithful to the Magisterium, must work together as an evangelizing society to produce "shining witnesses and models of holiness" in the world (Lumen Gentium, n.39).

The qualities of fatherhood must include practical aspects as well. We should be empathetic, careful, and attentive listeners. As chief servants of the domestic church, we must develop the skills to become excellent managers of our time and family resources that must be exercised "in accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which [we] possess [and] with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.907). To do this effectively, the spiritual father must see clearly with the eyes of Jesus Christ, through the lenses of faith, hope, and love. This vision, in turn, must give spiritual strength to the faithful, concreteness to the domestic church, and extend charitably to the broader community. We must live our lives "in harmony with [our] faith so that [we] can become the light of the world. We need that undeviating honesty which can attract all men to the love of truth and goodness, and finally to the Church and to Christ" (Apostolicam Actuositatem, n.13).

The spirituality of fatherhood must be rooted in Jesus Christ, the pillar of our salvation, through whom we can begin to understand the depths of the Heavenly Father's loving kindness. If we follow Christ's

example and allow ourselves to be open to the Father, who is rich in mercy, we can "evoke in the soul a movement of conversion, in order to redeem it and set it on course toward reconciliation" (Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, n.20). Our response to God's love and mercy must be that of the prodigal son: recognition of our sinfulness, humility before the Father, and the conversion of our hearts, minds, and wills. We must lead our families under Christ's call to service, because it is only by imitating the self-sacrificing Christ that we can ever hope to be role models and heroes worthy of the whole family's gratitude and honor.

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*Deacon Harold currently works as the Director of Public Safety at the University of Portland, and is a nationally recognized expert in school safety, security and violence prevention. He and his wife Colleen have four children.*

*His published articles can be read at: [Christianity.com](http://Christianity.com)*

*For more info. visit the Aurem Cordis website: [www.auremcordis.com](http://www.auremcordis.com)*

# Family Challenges

## Depth of Mercy

by Steve Moffitt

*Steve Moffitt writes from Portland, Oregon where he manages 88.3-KBVM-FM, a non-profit Catholic Radio Station.*

My wife and I were trying for our first child when I began thinking about what kind of a father I wanted to be. I had much to think about. I was afraid of being a father - - more to the point, of being a bad one. My own father loomed large in my thinking. He and I never had the kind of relationship that fathers and sons should have, to my thinking. He never talked about himself to me, never let me know what kind of person he was and hence what kind of person I should be. His idea of sharing conversation was superficial - a joke or two, a comment about the weather. He never wanted to know what my heart was feeling because he'd have to share what his heart was feeling and that was too painful for him to contemplate. I thought about the lack of a relationship with my father and how painful it was to me that we never met - - heart to heart. He always kept his heart hidden and I got tired of holding mine out. I didn't want to do that to my children.

New parents often get funny ideas about what their relationship with their children will be before they're born. Mine was that it would be easier to relate to a son than to a daughter, so I prayed that my first-born would be a girl. I reasoned that since it would be easier to be a father with my first child, and it would be more difficult for me as a man to relate to a girl than to a boy, that I should ask God for a daughter first, a wish He granted. She was and is adorable and, I've found very easy for me to relate to. I've been told that that is the way with girls. They're easy to deal with when they're young but when they become teenagers, look out. Not so with boys; "handful" is the term I hear most often. "Boys are a handful!" I tend to agree. But then I was a boy once, so I figured I'd be able to handle anything that came along regarding a son. I was,

however about to find out what life can throw at you as a father.

I always expect trouble to hit me like a mugger in some dark alley. Let the sky be dark and rain fall, and I'll expect trouble. It might be a product of too much TV growing up, or just my genetic make-up, but to me darkness spells trouble. Perhaps that's why it's always amazing to me how pain, suffering, and misery can come on beautiful, sunny days. On

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this day it was early spring in California, with the warm sun giving generous samples of the heat it would bring with summer, and everything green and lovely with new growth. It was a beautiful day. I still felt like a relatively new father at the time, having only two children: my daughter Katie at four and a half and my first son, Eli about to turn three. I can't explain to you how it felt at that

moment in my life, being a father to a son. You just have to experience it for yourself. The thoughts and emotions jumble together and form a sort of continuous swirl in your heart. Mostly it's a good feeling. What stood out, though was the one thought foremost in my mind and heart: that I would be able to have the kind, heart to heart relationship with my son that I was never able to have with my own dad. My son would know me, the "inside me", and I would know him. Most especially, we would be able to talk about the one thing most important to me-- Jesus.

Getting back to that day. I was walking up the walk into my parents' home. My sister was standing in the doorway. It was a beautiful picture with the new leaves rustling in the oak tree by the front door and the grass growing between the rocks at its base, a beautiful scene that would come crashing around my broken heart and my dumbstruck mind like the sudden darkness of being knocked unconscious. It was my sister, who majored in early childhood education in college and was by then a mother of five, who gingerly tore apart my happy world. She met us at my father's door and smiled at my wife and me with the kind of smile that lets you know she has something painful to say, but wishes she didn't. It was a question really, but a question I could no longer ignore. She asked if we had taken our son Eli to see a specialist? It was her gentle way of saying that she, too like the rest of my family had noticed a problem with my son Eli. They had kept to themselves. But now they wanted to make sure that my wife and I saw it, too. Up until that moment, I had held out hope that nothing was wrong with my son Eli, but with those words I realized that I could no longer deny that my son had a problem. That simple question tore away my dream

of being close to my son and replaced it with a fearful and dark emptiness. I couldn't understand how God could do this to me. God knew how I felt; He knew how hurt I was by my own father, that I longed to be close to my son in the way my father never was with me. He couldn't let this happen! Not to me. And yet, I couldn't deny any longer that there was a problem. I couldn't shrug off Eli's lack of speech and avoidance of eye contact and other different behaviors as something he'd grow out of. All I could do was cry and hope that somehow God would make it all right.

At three years of age, most children have developed their language skills enough to be able to make simple sentences and are able to play with other children. Eli had only two words: "no" and "juice", and he never made eye contact or played with his sister or other children. We'd noticed a difference in Eli by the time he was a year old. Physically he was like any other kid; he just never seemed interested in conversing with anyone. We took him to our pediatrician over and over again. We had his hearing checked. We were told over and over to relax, that Eli was just developing later than most kids. I thought Eli was just strong willed and too stubborn to talk. Why talk when you can get what you want by grunting? And to my great sorrow, I would occasionally punish him for being lazy about speaking. We desperately wanted to believe that nothing was wrong with our son. Gradually we began to see the right doctors, specialists who told us Eli was autistic - a disability doctors are still struggling to understand fully.

They couldn't tell us what caused it, or even assure us that Eli could be completely normal some day. They told us that there was nowhere for us to turn to for a cure, but that with speech therapy and time Eli might live a normal life.

I work in Catholic radio in Portland, Oregon and I live forty minutes from work. The drive home gives me time to think, and I find myself still thinking about what kind of a father I want to be. I have five children now. We added three more boys: Matthew (7), Nathaniel (4) and Benedict (6 months) to our family. I've learned much about autism over the last several years. I've watched Eli, who is now nine years old, struggle to learn some things and effortlessly to excel at others (reading, math - he's a whiz at both). I've sheltered him when he needed it, and encouraged him when he needed that, and I've waited. I've waited to be able to talk to Eli about myself, and I've waited for Eli to be able to understand, hoping that he would one day understand.

And then it hit me one night on my long drive home, that what frightened me most was that Eli would never be able to understand, not me so much me, as what was most important to me and that is Jesus. It is Jesus who makes all the difference in my life, Jesus who makes me the father that I am. And yet, at the same instant I knew that Jesus would not fail to let Eli know Him, that no matter how great the depth of my son's mental disabilities, Jesus would be there for him. He would bridge the gap - no matter how great - that lies between Eli and myself as well. As Saint Paul tells us, "For I am sure that neither

death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39 RSVCE). Depths come in all types, but God is to be found in each one! I suddenly understood how Love would stop at nothing to reach my son, and how His love for me and for Eli is not hindered by any barriers; that He can and will make himself known to all His children, most especially to those who need him the most.

With speech therapy, Eli has been able to make tremendous progress in the six years since that painful day. Eli is learning to overcome his disability. I am learning also. I'm learning that God works in ways that I don't understand and through circumstances I would never choose. He is merciful to me in my fear and misery, because though I despaired of ever being able to share myself with my son, He has shown me that I will one day. I just have to be still and know that He is God. As I've prayed about Eli, I have come to understand that Eli will be all right, and more importantly, that Eli's getting there will be a lesson - a sign of the depth of His mercy. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts [depths] of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (Psalm 139:7-10 RSVCE).

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## Gifts from the Magisterium

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### Catechism of the Catholic Church

Section II, Article 1: "I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator Of Heaven And Earth"

III: God, "He Who Is," Is Truth and Love

219, God's love for Israel is compared to a father's love for his son. His love for his people is stronger than a mother's for her children. God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved; his love will be victorious over even the worst infidelities and will extend to his most precious gift: **"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."** *Jn 3:16*

# The Seven Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph

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I. Joseph is perturbed about the motherhood of the Virgin Mary;

II. Joseph is denied hospitality to Mary for the birth of the Savior;

III. Joseph sorrowfully witnesses the circumcision of our Lord;

IV. The great sorrows of Our Lady are predicted by the prophet;

V. Joseph experiences concern and anxiety during the flight into Egypt;

VI. Joseph fears when told by an angel to return to Nazareth;

VII. Joseph painstakingly searches for Jesus after his loss in Jerusalem;

I. An angel reveals to him the mystery of the Incarnation.

II. He exults in the angelic tribute of glory at the birth of Christ.

III. He is delighted when the Holy Name of Jesus is given to the Infant.

IV. The prophet Simeon foretells the salvation of many souls.

V. He is happy at the final safety of Jesus and Mary.

VI. Home with Jesus and his Mother, Joseph rejoices in the Holy Family.

VII. Joseph is happy at finding the Holy Child in the temple.

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*The next time you are in Portland, Oregon visit the upper level of the Grotto /The Sanctuary of our Sorrowful Mother, where you will find the monument to the Seven Sorrows and Seven Joys of St. Joseph.*

# The Family Bulletin Board

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## Mission Statement

Founded in January, 1995, St. Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church is a Catholic apostolate dedicated to serving the family. Our mission is to help families recognize their role as the "domestic church", the Church at home, and to re-establish the home as a sacred refuge.

Visit our Website:  
[www.domesticchurch.us](http://www.domesticchurch.us)

## Send donations to:

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St. Joseph's Center is a non-profit 501-C 3 religious organization. Your generous contributions are tax deductible, and help in the printing and mailing of the journal.

## About Mark and Ruth

Mark and Ruth Andreas are married and the parents of six children. They founded St. Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church in 1995. Both had an interest in serving the Church; the result was this effort to serve the Christian family: through the journal before you and through occasional retreats and other special events in the Pacific Northwest.

## Think of it as a married couple's Retreat at home...

Obtain a copy of The Family for Families by Father Francis Filas, S.J. Reprinted by the Neumann Press, Long Prairie, MN in 2002.

Over the course of a weekend, select and together read the chapters on marriage. Ponder them and pray. Get to the Sacrament of Penance and attend Mass with your family.

Make a bit of time to talk together about what you have read. (Set the kids up with a good movie in another room.)

Remind each other of God's active Presence in your marriage, and of your abiding love for one another.

Here is a sample from the book:  
*A list of ways in which God helps married couples, through actual grace:*

- 1. To carry out God's law regarding the conception and birth of children;**
- 2. To enjoy and to make holy the pleasures of married life (which were created by God to soften its difficulties and to unite husband and wife more closely);**

**3. To carry the burdens of married life in a holy way;**

**4. To cherish each other and to grow in selfless love for each other, bearing with the inevitable defects that exist in every human being;**

**5. To bring up children properly, training them for a good and useful life on earth that will be a prelude to their supernatural life in heaven. (p.51)**

"It is true that in frequent instances in Catholic literature Joseph and Mary have been presented as models for the virginal state almost to the exclusion of their position as husband and wife....The fact is that almighty God in His providence made a remarkable arrangement whereby the couple could serve at one and the same time as exemplars and patrons of two states of life which normally would exclude each other. Joseph and Mary possessed true marriage rights but did not make use of them since theirs was a virginal marriage." (p.42)

"A benign Providence established the Holy Family in order that all Christians in whatever walk of life or situation might have reason and an incentive to fix their gaze on the Holy Family." - Leo XIII