

In popular culture today, fathers are too often portrayed, especially in the entertainment industry, as basically immature goof-offs, superficial seekers of pleasure and self-gratification – as more or less another child that his wife must oversee and regulate. Unfortunately, young people see these things and all too often imitate them, which then places a severe strain on the marriage and family life. More importantly it leads the father/husband, as well as his family, further and further from eternal life. Kids are going to be kids, inclined towards their passions, their immediate desires (this is the effect of original sin). They *need* parents, parents who know what is right and good and true and who put that as their first priority.

Married men today – husbands and fathers – need examples of real fatherhood to look to, to learn from, and to emulate. Being a husband and father is a serious vocation and one that God will hold husbands and fathers accountable for. This article will provide an example of real fatherhood, coming from holy mother Church herself. But first, before going on, let me note that this is for ladies – wives, mothers, and young unmarried ladies – as well. Why? Because, whether you realize it or not, it is the great desire of almost every young man and husband to please his wife, fiancée, or girlfriend. This is not something evil, provided they keep God first. But it does mean that if there is to be a return to real fatherhood as intended by God, young ladies and wives will need to examine their own standards and expectations as well. Where do you get your standards and expectations? From popular culture or from God? A man must be able to stand firm in what is right and good and true, even if his wife curses him for it – like Job. It is possible and necessary for all men to do the same. But it will be difficult and many will fail unless supported by their wife. If there is to be real change towards fatherhood as intended by God, the expectations of wives will need to match those intended by God.

How many boys today are taught even small acts of service like opening and holding doors for their elders or ladies, or carrying groceries in for their mother? Too many times the belief seems to be that there are only two choices for manhood, husband-hood, and fatherhood: either being a harsh militant tyrant or a hapless cream-puff. Neither are true. Examples of true and saintly fatherhood are badly needed. The most important need for real fatherhood is provided by a number of research studies. A Swiss study, for example, found that no matter how faithful a mother is, if the father does not practice the faith only 2% of the kids will remain in the faith; conversely if the father practices the faith, 75% of the time the kids will as well. Other studies have found similar results. *Why* this is, is much less important than *that* it is.

Dear fathers, your children, and especially your sons as they get old enough to understand, *need* and often even desire real instruction and direction from their fathers on what is right and good and true. If they don't receive instruction from you, they will find it elsewhere, and sadly that will rarely be the Church and our Lord but instead popular culture. They will then lose "The Way," and thus eternal life.

While there are multiple examples of good fatherhood amongst the saints, the one that will be drawn on here is one whose memorial was last Tuesday – St Louis of France. St Louis was king of France in the 1200's and he wrote a letter to his oldest son, who was expected to succeed him as king. Now you might think that the advice he would give would be something like: look out for the English, they'll always be trying to encroach on you; be wary of this or that duke; maintain a strong military, here's the taxes you should collect, and so on – in other words, very concrete instructions on how to advance himself and his kingdom in this life and this world. Well, let's take a look and see. The following is St Louis' letter to his son, edited somewhat edited for space.

“Dear son, the first thing I advise is that you fix your whole heart upon God, and love Him with all your strength, for without this no one can be saved or be of any worth. You should, with all your strength, shun everything which you believe to be displeasing to Him. And you ought especially to be resolved not to commit mortal sin, no matter what may happen and should permit all your limbs to be hewn off, and suffer every manner of torment, rather than fall knowingly into mortal sin.

If our Lord sends you any adversity, whether illness or other, you should receive it in good patience and be thankful for it, for you ought to believe that He will cause everything to turn out for your good; and likewise

you should think that you have well merited it because you have loved Him but little, and served Him but little, and have done many things contrary to His will. If our Lord send you any prosperity, either health of body or other thing you ought to thank Him humbly for it, and you ought to be careful that you are not the worse for it, either through pride or anything else, for it is a very great sin to fight against our Lord with His gifts.

I advise you to accustom yourself to frequent confession, and that you choose always, as your confessors, men who are upright and sufficiently learned, and who can teach you what you should do and what you should avoid. I advise you to listen willingly and devoutly the services of Holy Church, and, when you are in church, avoid frivolity and trifling, and do not look here and there; but pray to God with lips and heart alike...Have a tender pitiful heart for the poor, and for all those whom you believe to be in misery of heart or body, and, according to your ability, comfort and aid them with some alms. Maintain the good customs of your realm, and put down the bad ones...Listen willingly to the word of God, both in open and in secret.

Love all good, and hate all evil, in whomsoever it may be. Let no one be so bold as to say, in your presence, words which attract and lead to sin, and do not permit words of detraction to be spoken of another behind his back. Do not tolerate any ill spoken of God or His saints in your presence. Give thanks to God often for all the good things He has done for you, so that you may be worthy to receive more. Honor and love all the people of Holy Church, and be careful that no violence be done to them. Love your brothers and always wish their well-being, and instruct them in all good. But be watchful lest, for the love which you bear to one, you turn aside from right doing, and do to the others that which is not right.

Inquire often concerning those of your household if they be too covetous or too arrogant; for it is natural that the members should seek to imitate their chief; that is, when the master is wise and well-behaved, all those of his household follow his example and prefer it. For however much you ought to hate evil in others, you should have more hatred for the evil which comes from those who derive their power from you.

I advise you always to be devoted to the Church of Rome, and to the sovereign pontiff...have wickedness expelled from your land, that is to say, nasty oaths, and everything said or done against God or our Lady or the saints. In a wise and proper manner put a stop, in your land, to bodily sins, dicing, taverns, and other sins. Put down heresy so far as you can, and hold in special abhorrence all people who are hostile to the Faith...

Further the right with all your strength. Moreover, I admonish you to strive most earnestly to show your gratitude for the benefits which our Lord has bestowed upon you, and that you may know how to give Him thanks. Take care that the expenses of your household are reasonable and moderate, and that its moneys are justly obtained. And there is one opinion that I deeply wish you to entertain – that you keep yourself free from foolish expenses and evil exactions, and that your money should be well expended and well acquired.

Finally, most sweet son, I conjure and require you that, if it please our Lord that I should die before you, you have my soul succored with Masses and prayers...In conclusion, dear son, I give you all the blessings which a good and tender father can give to a son, and I pray our Lord Jesus Christ, by His mercy, by the prayers and merits of His blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, and of angels and archangels and of all the saints, to guard and protect you from doing anything contrary to His will..."

If every father instructed their children as St Louis taught his, and they lived it out because they saw their fathers value it so much, then this world would be a different place and souls might just be entering into Heaven like snowflakes, rather than falling into hell like snowflakes (as Sr Lucia saw at Fatima). Yes, your children need to learn how to make a living but if that's all they learn, or if that is even first & foremost, their life will end as a miserable, never-ending failure. I encourage both men and women to read St Louis' letter to his son several times; young ladies, use this as a guide in a search for a husband; wives, use this letter to encourage and support your husbands; young men, fathers, husbands, use this as a guide to real fatherhood, as willed by God.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn