

On September 29, 2015, Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix, AZ promulgated a letter to the men of his diocese called: "Into the Breach." The last section of this letter is on fatherhood, which is presented below. It is excellent. Unfortunately his entire letter could not be included because of space limitations, and even this 3rd part on fatherhood had to be edited some in order to fit into one article. The entirety of his letter can be found here: <https://dphx.org/into-the-breach/>. And now, a portion of "Into the Breach" on fatherhood...

Fatherhood is essential. Fatherhood changes history. In the words of St. John Paul II:

"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."

All men are called to fatherhood in some way. Pope Francis stated the following:

"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 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."

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 attempts to abolish fatherhood." The great pontiff of the family points to our first parents' original act of disobedience as 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, 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, but rather because of 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, 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...and the Lord will not 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." 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, 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." 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 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 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.

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.

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.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn