



The Mission of Christian Fathers Today

Jesus'
Construction Crew
for the
Rebuilding of
the Church

Msgr. Roger J. Landry
Successful Fathers Conference
Dallas Country Club, Dallas Texas
March 28, 2026



The Crisis of Fatherhood

- Cardinal Ratzinger on the Crisis of Fatherhood (Palermo, 2000)
 - “The crisis of fatherhood we are living today is an element, perhaps the most important, threatening man in his humanity.”
 - “The dissolution of fatherhood,” flowing from reducing it merely to a biological phenomenon, leads to the “dissolution of what it means to be a son or daughter” and impedes our relationship to relate to God as he is and revealed himself.
- This is a theological, anthropological, sociological and interpersonal crisis.



The Crisis of Fatherhood

- Theological – If we don't have a solid experience of fatherhood, we may not be able to understand well, and relate to, the Blessed Trinity and especially God the Father.
- Anthropological – If we have a defective understanding of fatherhood, we may have an erroneous understanding of who man is and who the human person is, male or female. We likewise can struggle with what it means to be a son or a daughter.
- Sociological – Those who grow up without a father in the home have much higher rates of poverty, infant mortality, academic struggles, suspensions and school drop out rates, emotional and behavioral problems, sexual abuse and neglect, alcohol and drug use, obesity, homelessness, promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, juvenile incarceration and suicide.
- Interpersonal – Those with father deficits can have greater struggles with self-confidence, insecurity, self-esteem, authority, forming healthy relationships.



The Crisis of Fatherhood

- In the United States, according to the US Census Bureau (2025), 18.2 million children under 18, 24 percent, are being raised without a biological, step or adoptive father in the home. That's twice the population of New York City.
- The rates of fatherless homes are 48 percent for black children, 25 percent for Hispanic children and 16 percent for white children.



The Crisis of Fatherhood

- Elements of the Crisis
 - Radical Feminism's deconstruction of cultural esteem for gender roles, for masculinity and femininity, for marriage and the nuclear family, for the importance of fatherhood. This has only grown with gender confusion.
 - Reduction of fatherhood ("to father a child") to procreation. Once fathers were considered indispensable care givers, not they're considered superfluous. Co-residency with children and a parental alliance with the mother were no longer necessary. The redefinition of marriage and family have pushes even husbandless marriages and fatherless families.
 - Increasing rates of divorce, including "no fault" divorce.
 - The sexual revolution made possible by widespread contraceptive use and access to abortion, leading to skyrocketing rates of out of wedlock conception. Now exacerbated by IVF (and "sperm dads").



The Response

- This crisis demands a response. The response must involve not only from men and dads but must involve men and dads taking responsibility not just for the women in their life and their children but also far more for the culture that has driven the crisis and dissolution of fatherhood.
- In response to radical feminism, men must help foster a culture of rooted and responsible manhood and virtuous and faithful fatherhood.
- This is necessary to rebuild marriage, family and society, the domestic Church, the parish church and the universal church.
- St. John Paul II said the future of humanity passes by way of the family; that means the future of humanity, the Church and society, hinges on Christian men helping to build up marriage and the family through responsible love.



The Radiation of Fatherhood

- To live out this mission, especially after the conceptual confusion of the last 60 years, there is a need for men to have a clear sense of what fatherhood is and what men's mission is.
- In 1964, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla, the future St. John Paul II wrote a play entitled *The Radiation of Fatherhood* in order to try to help the men of Poland, young and old, understand better their mission and live it. This was in response to much communist programming that sought to undermine the strength of the family and the Church, not to mention some stubborn authoritarian tendencies among Polish men.
- By the title "Radiation," he sought to indicate that fatherhood is not just biological or social, but something that flows outward, that illuminates identity and relationships even when not explicitly seen, and ultimate comes from and leads back to God the Father.



The Radiation of Fatherhood

- The brief play features three characters: Adam (Father), Monika (Mother) and a son.
- It's centered on Adam's struggles to understand his role as father. Gradually he realizes that fatherhood is not about authority, power and control, but about giving oneself in love, responsibility for another's existence, and spiritual leadership in guiding others toward truth.



The Radiation of Fatherhood

- Among the points Wojtyla makes literarily are:
 - A father must give himself away in order to become a true father. (*Gaudium et Spes* 22, 24). Authority is to serve not to be served.
 - A child needs a father to discover his origin and identity. He can't answer the questions as to who he is, where he comes from, where he's going or to whom he belongs without fatherhood. The father also helps him answer, "Am I loved?" Without this, a child remains fragile, unstable and incomplete. This is true at a natural and supernatural level.
 - Human fatherhood is a participation in divine love and God's fatherhood (Eph 3:15). It is incomplete without reference to God. Part of the *imago Dei*, it is called to be a reflection of God's fatherhood.



The Radiation of Fatherhood

- We can say that human fatherhood participates in God's fatherhood – and reflects in, not the other way around – in three main ways:
 - Giving life – understood not just as biological life (bringing a child into existence) but also personal and spiritual life (helping the child to mature and grow). In theological terms, not just *bios* but *zoe*.
 - Providing and protecting – Helping to meet material, psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual means by creating a stable, secure and safe environment.
 - Guiding toward the truth and toward God – The father is meant to be a wise teacher who through words and example, forms and leads a child toward what matters most, toward happiness, toward life to the full.



The Vocation to Continue Jesus' Mission

- To be buttressed in fatherly identity, spirituality and mission, we need to turn first to God the Father, from whom all fatherhood derives. Even though we will never perfectly radiate his fatherhood, we are nevertheless called to reflect it.
- Jesus' essential mission on earth was the reveal to us the Father and help us learn how to relate to him so that we can in fact not just be called, but be, children of God.
- Human fathers – biological, adoptive and spiritual – have the vocation to continue Jesus' mission of helping people ground their existence on God the Father's love (Jn 3:16).
- That will be the subject of the next part of this conference.



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Learning from Jesus About God the Father

- As a summary of the first talk and an introduction to the second, we can turn to Pope Benedict's words in a 2012 General Audience:
 - “Perhaps men today do not perceive the beauty, the grandeur and the profound consolation contained in the word ‘father’; by which we may address God in prayer, because the father figure today is often not sufficiently present; and this presence is often not adequately positive in daily life. **A father's absence ... is a great problem of our time; and therefore, it becomes difficult to understand the profound significance of what it means to say that God is a Father to us.**”
 - “**We can learn from Jesus Himself, and from His filial relationship with God, what being a ‘father’ truly means, and the true nature of the Father who is in heaven. Critics of religion have said that to speak of the ‘Father,’ of God, would be a projection of our human fathers onto heavenly realities. But the opposite is true: in the Gospel, Christ shows us who a father is and what a true father is like, so that we may sense what true fatherhood is, and also learn true fatherhood.**”



Jesus' Own "Fatherhood"

- Most often we are accustomed to understanding Christ according to his being the eternal Son of God.
- Many Patristic sources (Saints Melito of Sardis, Ireneus, and Justin Martyr, the Letter to Diognetus) looked at Jesus as Son insofar as he is generated by the Father and as father insofar as he generates eternal life in us through his passion, death and resurrection received in the Sacraments.
- Jesus is the icon or image of the Father from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth takes its name (Eph 3:14-15).
- He is the New Adam, the father of a renewed humanity, transmitting to his children a new principle of life that transcends death.
- His fatherhood is virginal (eschatological) and spiritual (communicating the fullness of God's spirit).



Jesus' Fatherhood and Spiritual Fatherhood

- Jesus' fatherhood continues through the Church in priests ("fathers") and in all those who exercise spiritual fatherhood toward others. We're told not to call anyone on earth our father, because every exercise of fatherhood is ultimately meant to bring us back to God the Father.
- St. Paul tried to live this. His fatherhood is shown in **bringing about the birth of Christ in others.**
 - "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal 4:19).
 - "We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves. You are witnesses, and God as well, ... how, **like a father with his children**, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you" (1 Thess 2:7-10).
 - "I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. **For though you have countless guides (pedagogues) in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel** (1 Cor 4:14-15). He was different than a pedagogue, an enslaved tutor who looked after external discipline; he saw himself as a generator of life within them.



How Jesus Reveals God the Father

- Jesus came to reveal God the Father.
- In addition to revealing him and his love through his body language, he also spoke constantly of him so that we might come to know the Father personally.



Jesus Seeks to Bring Us Into Communion

- Jesus teaches us to bring us into communion with the Father through teaching us how to pray to him by his own prayers and by his teaching us to pray:
 - “I rejoice, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...”
 - “Father, I thank you for having heard me...”
 - “Father, glorify your Son...”
 - “Father, may they be one...”
 - “Father, forgive them...”
 - “Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit.”
 - “Our Father, who art in heaven...”
- He also seeks to teach us about nine traits of God the Father that we’re called to radiate and imitate



(1) The Father Takes Delight in His Children

- “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased,” God the Father thunders at Jesus’ baptism (Mt 3:17).
- Fathers must express their love for their children. This is obviously a key point meant to underpin for all paternal interactions.



(2) The Father Loves Unconditionally

- Jesus says the Father makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Mt 5:45).
- The Father cares about everyone, 100 out of 100: “So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Mt 18:14).



(3) The Father is Generous, Providential and Responsible

- “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Mt 6:26)
- “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Mt 7:11)



(4) The Father is Attentive and Observant

- He sees what is done in secret and rewards (Mt 6:4).
- He pays such good attention that he knows what is needed even before it is asked (Mt 6:8)



(5) The Father is Merciful

- We see his nature in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15).
- Jesus calls all his followers to be merciful as the heavenly father is merciful, to forgive as the father forgives (Lk 6:36).



(6) The Father Teaches and Guides

- “At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will’” (Mt 11:25-26).
- “And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven’” (Mt 16:17).
- “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father” (Jn 6:44).



(7) The Father Disciplines Out of Love

- We see throughout the Old Testament how God disciplines and instructs the Israelites.
- Drawing from these lessons, St. Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but **bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord**” (Eph 6:4).
- “Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? — ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.’ ... God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. ... They disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:5-11).
- There is an obvious importance of our disciplining as fathers so that through us the Holy Spirit can form true disciples. We can’t have disciples without discipline!



(8) The Father Works

- “But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working still, and I am working.” (Jn 5:17)
- How important it is for fathers in general and spiritual fathers in particular to be hard workers!



(9) The Father Wants to Share Eternal Life with His Children

- “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (Jn 6:40)



What Jesus revealed about God the Father by his Words

- Jesus himself showed these nine traits
- Jesus wants all men, called to grow in the image and likeness of God, called to “follow Jesus” to seek to emulate these qualities.
- We are called to:
 - Take delight
 - Love unconditionally
 - Be generous, giving ourselves
 - Observe providentially and gratefully
 - Be Merciful
 - Pass on wisdom
 - Discipline with and out of love
 - Work
 - Share life and spur others to eternity



Responding to the Crisis of Fatherhood

- Since “the crisis of fatherhood we are living today is an element, perhaps the most important, threatening man in his humanity,” the mission of Christian men and dads today is, by their life and words, to form children and others to ground their existence in the fatherly imprint of human life and existence.
- This involves, among other things:
 - Learning from God the Father through Jesus. We are made in God’s image and likeness. Imitating his Fatherhood helps us to become fully who we are.
 - Modeling this fatherly dimension of human existence for others so that they may be able to know who they are and follow our example.
 - Training the young to appreciate the fatherly imprint of human life, develop the virtues and exercise the responsibilities associated with it.



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The Mission of Christian Fathers

- Fathers are called to give life and help others mature and grow, to provide and protect, and to guide toward the truth and toward God. They are called to do this according to their nature, made in the image and likeness of God.
- There are many contexts in which they are summoned to do this: at home in their families, with their children; at work, as they mentor and fulfill their duties among coworkers and clients; in their communities, as they take responsibility for their direction; in the Church, in their parishes, dioceses and the universal Church.
- We can look at some examples for inspiration and direction.



Saint Francis of Assisi

- This year, on October 3rd, we mark the 800th anniversary of the death of Giovanni Bernardone, known by his nickname Francesco, coming from the fact that his mom was French.
- Jesus' command: "Francis, rebuild my Church, which you see is falling down." Far more than rebuilding the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano, but the Church universal, made out of living stones.
- *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. The Church is always being rebuilt, reformed, reshaped, precisely because it is made out of living stones built on Peter the living rock and on Christ the cornerstone.
- We are all summoned to be part of that reconstruction crew.



Saint Francis of Assisi

- In the Gospel, Jesus, the *tekton* or construction worker, talked to us of two types of houses: on sand and on rock. Many try to build quickly, to take the easy path, but in ways that cannot survive the storms. He urges us to build on living according to his word.
- Francis, the former “king of the feast,” decided to build his house on the Lord, uniting himself to him, trusting in his providence through poverty, his love through chastity, his will through obedience, his redemptive suffering through the stigmata.
- What type of house are we going to build for our family? For the Church at our parish and beyond? What are the materials that we need to build in a way that will last?



Abraham

- We call Abraham our “father in faith.” The most important building material is faith, which Jesus says can move mountains.
- Faith is a trust in God that leads us to trust in what he says and to act on it.
- We see this in Abraham’s life leaving his homeland, at God’s command, at 75, in his willingness to fight for what would become his inheritance; in his acceptance that at his and Sarah’s advanced ages, he would become a father not just of a child, not just of a nation, but many nations, and wait 25 years; and in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the beloved son of the promise, trusting that if he should be slain God would raise him from the dead (Heb 11:19).



Abraham

- Abram means “exalted father.” He was already exercising his fatherhood before Sarah would conceive Isaac, in the way that he cared for Sarah and his extended family. He was giving life, helping others mature, providing for and protecting them, and seeking to guide them in accordance with what God had revealed.
- God would change his name to “Abraham,” which means “father of a multitude” or “father of many nations.” His fatherhood would extend far beyond his family. He would become that promised father not just through Isaac and Ishmael, but ultimately through Jesus according to his humanity.



Abraham

- Our fatherhood is an intrinsic part of the paternal meaning of our masculinity, of our sharing, as men, in the image of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- It's formed and exercised through loving responsibility before and even without biological fatherhood.
- It extends to those who are not biological children. We can become the father of a nation, a spiritual father, even a holy father to the Church, participating in the life-giving, provident, protective leadership of God the Father.
- But the most important part of that fatherhood is to be a father in faith, to transmit this existential trust in God and its various traits.



Abraham

- Prayer – Abraham was a man of prayer, entering into conversation with him, listening attentively to God’s voice. We see him interceding for Sodom.
- Obedience – He did what God was asking, even and especially when it was hard. He was willing to change and to journey.
- Confidence – He trusted even when God seemed to be suggesting the impossible.
- Commitment – He entered into and kept his covenant with God. He loved God enough to sacrifice what was dearest.
- Perseverance – He never gave up, dwelling in tents, awaiting with hope and without doubt the fulfillment of God’s promises.



Joseph

- Our other “father in faith” is St. Joseph. Pope Benedict XVI said about him: “Throughout all of history, Joseph is the man who gives God the greatest display of trust, even in the face of such astonishing news.”
- Abraham and Joseph both left their country at God’s command without knowing the future.
- Both trusted that God could give a child outside of the laws of nature; Bishop Jacques Bénigne Bossuet: “The Bible commends Abraham to us as the pattern of perfect faith (Rom. 4:11), but Joseph's faith was greater: Abraham is praised because he believed that a barren woman would bear a child; Joseph believed the same of a virgin, and in simplicity accepted that inscrutable mystery of child-bearing maidenhood.
- Both were willing to allow a chosen and beloved son to be sacrificed, knowing that God had the power to raise him.



Joseph

- All men can learn from him many lessons about how to be a father in faith.
- St. John Paul II: “If Elizabeth said of the Redeemer's Mother, ‘Blessed is she who believed,’ in a certain sense this blessedness can be referred to Joseph as well, since he responded positively to the word of God when it was communicated to him at the decisive moment.” It was his own fiat, which lovingly strengthened hers.
- We can look at the various virtues that flowed from his being a father of faith, which are meant to become contagious examples for us to follow.



Joseph

- “Just” – in right relationship with God, ad-justing to what God asks. His faith is not separated from his actions. He gives to God what God deserves (prayer, praise, thanks, contrition, time, faith, hope, love) and what others what they deserve.
- Theocentric silence – He doesn’t speak in Sacred Scripture except to pronounce Jesus’ name at his circumcision. Silence isn’t empty but meant to be filled with God. Pope Benedict said we need to be “infected” with St. Joseph’s silence to hear God’s voice.
- Prayer – Prayer is faith in action. His life was a *lectio divina*, a life-long Rosary, focused on Jesus and Mary. He humbly led them in prayer according to Jewish tradition.



Joseph

- Obedience – St. Paul talks about the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). St. Joseph listened to obey and obeyed even when God instructed him through dreams.
- Continuous Conversion – With faith, he constantly readjusted (“turned-with”) God’s instructions as he changed from his will to God’s.
- A Man of the Eucharist – “For years Joseph lived in the awful sanctity of that which to the priest is but a moment. The little house at Nazareth was as the outspread square of the white corporal” (Faber). The cave in Bethlehem and the Holy House in Nazareth became tabernacles where he and Mary lived in the Real Presence with adoration. He shows us how to live with faith a Eucharistic life.



Joseph

- A vigilant protector – It's striking that God waited until the last second to send the angel to awake St. Joseph to tell him that Herod's assassins were approaching and that he needed to take Jesus and Mary right away into Egypt. St. John Paul II: "Is it not logical and necessary that he to whom the eternal Father entrusted his Son should offer the same protection to the Body of Christ which ... is the Church?"
- A hard-working provider – He was a builder (tekton) who traveled with tools. St. John Paul II called him the "very epitome of the Gospel of work," not just making things but building himself and his family. He taught Jesus human work and teaches us how to sanctify work.



Joseph

- A chaste lover – “He took Mary into his home. He welcomed the mystery that was in Mary and the mystery that was Mary herself. He loved her with great respect, which is the mark of all authentic love. Joseph teaches us that it is possible to love without possessing” (Benedict XVI). Even though Mary was the most sublime creature God ever formed, and even though Joseph lived with her for twelve to thirty years, he protected her vocation to virginal maternity. His purity corresponded to hers. We call him “most chaste,” a virtue connected not just to temperance but to love, purity and piety. One of the most important things for fathers in faith to teach today, in an a pornified and lustful age is how to be not just “chaste enough” but “most chaste.”



Joseph

- Charity – The Christian life is “faith working through love” (Gal 5:16). St. Joseph made “a total gift of self, of his life and work; [he] turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house” (St. Paul VI). St. Alphonsus : “On the last day our Savior will say to the elect, ‘I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me....’ These will have fed Jesus Christ, lodged or clothed Him in the persons of the poor; but St. Joseph found food, shelter and raiment for Christ in His own person.”



Joseph

- Humble Authority – “Joseph understood that Jesus was superior to him even as he submitted to him, and, knowing the superiority of his charge, he commanded him with respect and moderation. Everyone should reflect on this: frequently a lesser man is placed over people who are greater, and it happens at times that an inferior is more worthy than the one who appears to be set above him. If a person of greater dignity understands this, then he will not be puffed up with pride because of his higher rank; he will know that his inferior may well be superior to him, even as Jesus was subject to Joseph” (Origen). St. Joseph shows us the reverence we need for those we serve through authority, like Joseph showed that reverence toward Mary and toward Jesus.



Joseph

- It's an awesome reality that, according to his humanity, Jesus himself would call Joseph "Abba." That Mary would refer to him as Jesus' father when they found him in the temple. That he would have exercised the role of father in naming him Jesus at his circumcision.
- Pope Francis said about him: "Fathers are not born but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child."
- Pope Benedict encouraged all dads to "take Saint Joseph as their model" since he shows the "deepest meaning of their own fatherhood," adding, "To be a father means above all to be at the service of life and growth. Saint Joseph, in this sense, gave proof of great devotion."



Becoming Successful Fathers

- Saint Teresa of Calcutta often said, “God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful.” Often we look at success with worldly, rather than supernatural, metrics, and what’s far more important is to do what we ought and leave the results to God.
- With that in mind, we can speak of “successful fathers” in terms of their faithfulness to God and in seeking to transmit to others in the domestic church, the parish church (which includes all those in parish boundaries) and wider church the example of fidelity to God and the virtues that flow from faith.
- This is ultimately the way we are able to be built up into a spiritual edifice on Christ the cornerstone and help build and reform the Church as God’s construction crew in every age.



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