

FORWARD!
INTO THE BREACH

A COMPENDIUM WORKBOOK TO

INTO THE BREACH

AN APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION TO CATHOLIC MEN,
MY SPIRITUAL SONS IN THE DIOCESE OF PHOENIX
BY BISHOP THOMAS J. OLMSTED

ANTHONY J. CASTELLANO

TO MY FIVE SONS, CHRISTOPHER, JOSEPH, STEPHEN, PAUL,
AND MICHAEL; MY SON IN-LAW, MATTHEW; MY TWO
GRANDSONS, LUKE AND LEO; AND TO MY FATHER,
CARMINE CHRISTOPHER CASTELLANO

JANUARY 2017

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Also I want to thank my spiritual fathers, Fr. Joseph Rogers, Pastor, and Fr. David Wells, Parochial Vicar, and all my brothers in Christ in my home parish, St. John Neumann in Gaithersburg, MD. I especially thank Mr. Charles Minear for his constant encouragement in all of my efforts. Further, I am indebted to Mrs. Mary Beth de Ribeaux for the many hours spent in review of several drafts. Her keen eye and fervor for accuracy was a service I could not have done without.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and their most kind responses when I said on more than a few occasions, "I think I'm finally done!" for them only to see me the next night continuing on. My wife and dear children continue to amaze me as they reflect the love of Christ.

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FOREWORD

Since the publication of *Into the Breach*, on the Feast of the Archangels last year, I have been grateful for the feedback of so many faithful priests, deacons, husbands, wives, mothers and fathers. Their gratitude echoes my own gratitude for their generous embrace of faithfulness and fruitfulness in their vocations. It is a sign to me that the Holy Spirit is at work among us, tilling the soil that needs only the *Joy of the Gospel* spread as seeds by the Church, preparing the hearts of Catholic men for deeper commitment to faith, hope and charity.

Among the respondents was a generous father of seven and parish leader of men, Anthony Castellano, who saw the need for a study guide for the exhortation in order to bring it to life more fruitfully among the men he leads in his parish men's group. I am grateful to Anthony for providing a high-quality guide and for working with Mike Phelan, our Diocese of Phoenix Director of Marriage and Respect Life, to provide this aid to further reflection on the spiritual battle of our time, and our mission of Christ-like, magnanimous and courageous love of those the Lord has given us to serve.

This desire of men to battle for a great cause has its true fulfillment in the world in the spiritual realm. *"For we are not contending with flesh and blood, but against the principalities, the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (Ephesians 6:12) When we have eyes to see, we sense all around us the need to engage courageously. True engagement and victory in this battle depend on our complete trust in the Lord and His Church's teaching, in firm hope of human flourishing with His grace, and with complete assurance of the ultimate victory having already been won!

I encourage those of you in leadership roles to use the *Forward! Into the Breach* compendium workbook for men's groups and to pray for a renewal of virtuous masculinity and lively commitment to Christ in Catholic men. When we live this commitment, we realize that no greater adventure exists.

Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted
Diocese of Phoenix
May, 2016

PREFACE

Forward! - Into the Breach is a compendium workbook that builds upon “*Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men, my Spiritual Sons in the Diocese of Phoenix*,” an important testimony of faith written by Bishop Thomas Olmsted. An apostolic exhortation is published to encourage the faithful to live in a specific way. Bishop Olmsted also refers to his work as a letter. Apostolic letters address matters of concern to particular groups. Thus, “*Into the Breach*” is specifically addressed to Catholic men on the importance and urgency of living today as a man of Christ.

Suitable for both personal and group use, *Forward!* - Into the Breach contains the complete Apostolic Exhortation by Bishop Olmsted. The workbook also presents corresponding questions, testimony, and expressions of belief of the Roman Catholic faith that are ideal for discussion, meditation, and prayer. Three appendices follow the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation. The first appendix presents prayers of the church that proclaim the faith and encourage us in our spiritual battle; the second, provides a guide to the Sacrament of Confession, as well as a detailed examination of conscience; and the last appendix lists some scripture passages that may be helpful in times of struggle.

PROLOGUE

Since releasing his Apostolic Exhortation, it has been clear that Bishop Olmsted's work has galvanized many Catholic men across the United States and beyond, in a way that is poignant for our time. The lives of men in this 21st century are at a pivotal point. Each man must decide for himself if the reality of revealed truth is something he desires, or not. Was there a man named Jesus Christ who walked this earth 2,000 years ago, who was the incarnate Word of God, or not? Did He call forth twelve ordinary men to receive and carry forward his message of mercy and forgiveness, and did He therein establish an apostolic succession of leadership that exists to this day, or not? Does this one holy catholic and apostolic church, founded by Jesus Himself - preserve the divinely inspired revealed truth of the Father through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and include within it the promise of God that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it, or not?

Is mankind, created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore so endowed to the highest perfection that he alone is privileged to procreate in communion with God, to produce new singularly dignified souls that shall live forever with a God who desires nothing more than this, or not?

And, among the created heavens of Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, is there a creature so magnificently intelligent to be called the "Morning Star, Son of Dawn" (Isaiah 14:12), who despite all his brilliance, chose not to serve the God man Jesus and mankind alike, or not? Did he instead declare to the heavenly host, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God, I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14), or not? Is this creature, whose name is Satan, the devil, who in losing the battle for primacy in heaven was cast down to the earth and swept with him a third of all the angels in heaven (cf. Revelation 12:4), or not? Recall the words of Jesus, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). And does this devil out of his pride and hatred of the Almighty, constantly war against all mankind until the end of time to deny God the family He desires to be with Him for all eternity, or not?

Either we believe, or we don't. I pray you do! Because as St. Paul tells us, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" - (1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV). Men, this power St. Paul speaks of enables us to become who we are, sons of the Father.

We have an opportunity here. Never forget the lesson of the prodigal son (cf. Luke 15:11-32): God rejoices when we come to him, repent of our sins, and ask him for help. Yes, He rejoices! Jesus tells us, "[T]here will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

In the 1930's a young Polish nun, Sister Faustina Kowalska, received extraordinary revelation from Jesus. In her Diary, now Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, writes, "... [A]pproach [Jesus] with sincerity, [and] our miseries, sins and evil deeds vanish; he will settle our debts when we surrender ourselves to him" (para. 1748). Earlier, in paragraph 1485 Jesus told her, "My mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world" and "I am your strength, I will help you in the struggle."

This is important because the Lord tells us to expect persecution:

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them ... [D]o not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ... [A]nd you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:16-22)

As Bishop Olmsted says, this battle is primarily spiritual. But the spiritual battle has been manifested in the world with harsh words and actions, and now in America even potential personal loss and incarceration from laws that deny the truth. Yet we are confident of the victory found in the truth itself, Christ! The Bishop's letter explains this reality to us, and what we need to do. *Men, read it, do it, and live it!*

Each of us needs to start where we are right now. We may believe, but not fully, or we may fear our sins are too great to forgive. But we just need to look at those who came before us. If you don't know where to start, start here with the prayers of men from the New Testament whose hearts were powerfully struck by the truth:

Immediately [he] exclaimed [to Jesus], "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"
(Mark 9:24, NIV)

[B]ut he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:48, NIV)

Jesus wants us to know, "Be not afraid of your Savior, O sinful soul. I make the first move to come to you... [D]o not run away from your Father" (*Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, para. 1485). And as St. Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). From the beginning, God has powerfully acted in the lives of men, and today He desires to work in **your** life.

Perhaps Jesus has made the first move to come to you! It is my hope and prayer that many men will find this compendium workbook a faithful guide to receive Jesus in the totality in which He seeks them and then join together and go *Forward!* - Into the Breach.

Anthony J. Castellano

Author's Note to Readers: For clarity in differentiating between the text of Bishop Olmsted's Apostolic Exhortation and the author's added workbook material, workbook questions that accompany each section of the Apostolic Exhortation, as well as interspersed text boxes and graphic illustrations, are marked by the Greek Chi-Rho symbol (✠) in the lower right corner of the page, illustration, and/or text box.

Why Chi-Rho? The Chi-Rho symbol is an ancient Christogram where the intersecting Greek letters Chi (X) and Rho (P) form the first two letters of "Christ" in Greek. It was used as a labarum, or banner, prominently held high by the men of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 3rd century. It is said, that as Constantine marched with his army before a battle he looked up into the sky and saw Rho as the cross and Chi together along with the words, "In this sign, you will conquer."

And so, it is in the cross of Jesus Christ that we will triumph. May ✠ lead our way!

INTO THE BREACH

**An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men, my Spiritual Sons in the
Diocese of Phoenix**

Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix

*“And I sought for a man among them who should build up the
wall and stand in the breach before me for the land...”*

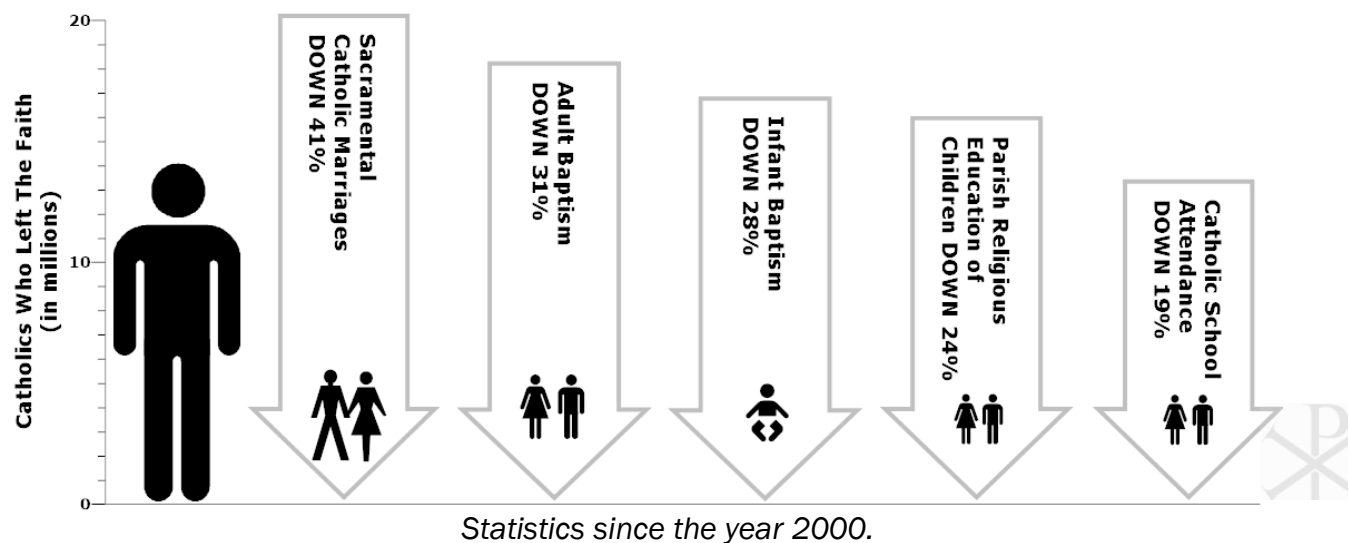
Ezekiel 22:30

A Call to Battle

I begin this letter with a clarion call and clear charge to you, my sons and brothers in Christ: Men, *do not hesitate to engage in the battle that is raging around you*, the battle that is wounding our children and families, the battle that is distorting the dignity of both women and men. This battle is often hidden, but the battle is real. It is primarily spiritual, but it is progressively killing the remaining Christian ethos in our society and culture, and even in our own homes.

The world is under attack by Satan, as our Lord said it would be (1 Peter 5:8-14). This battle is occurring in the Church herself, and the devastation is all too evident. Since AD 2000, 14 million Catholics have left the faith, parish religious education of children has dropped by 24%, Catholic school attendance has dropped by 19%, infant baptism has dropped by 28%, adult baptism has dropped by 31%, and sacramental Catholic marriages have dropped by 41%.¹ *This is a serious breach, a gaping hole in Christ's battle lines.* While the Diocese of Phoenix has fared better than these national statistics, the losses are staggering.

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.
1 Peter 5:8-10



One of the key reasons that the Church is faltering under the attacks of Satan is that many Catholic men have not been willing to “step into the breach” – to fill this gap that lies open and vulnerable to further attack. A large number have left the faith, and many who remain “Catholic” practice the faith timidly and are only minimally committed to passing the faith on to their children. Recent research shows that large numbers of young Catholic men are leaving the faith to become “nones” – men who have no religious affiliation. The growing losses of young Catholic men will have a devastating impact on the Church in America in the coming decades,

as older men pass away and young men fail to remain and marry in the Church, accelerating the losses that have already occurred.

These facts are devastating. As our fathers, brothers, uncles, sons, and friends fall away from the Church, they fall deeper and deeper into sin, breaking their bonds with God and leaving them vulnerable to the fires of Hell. While we know that Christ welcomes back every repentant sinner, the truth is that large numbers of Catholic men are failing to keep the promises they made at their children's baptisms – promises to bring them to Christ and to raise them in the faith of the Church.

This crisis is evident in the discouragement and disengagement of Catholic men like you and me. In fact, this is precisely why I believe this Exhortation is needed, and it is also the reason for my hope, for God constantly overcomes evil with good. The joy of the Gospel is stronger than the sadness wrought by sin! A throw-away culture cannot withstand the new life and light that constantly radiates from Christ. So I call upon you to open your minds and hearts to Him, the Savior who strengthens you to step into the breach!

“The world is under attack by Satan, as our Lord said it would be.”

The material world is not the only the reality in which we exist. The spiritual world is here, now, and just as real. As Jeffrey Steffon explains in *Spiritual Warfare for Catholics* (p. 25), it is only when we acknowledge the reality of the spiritual world that it is possible to discern properly the reasons behind our actions.



Questions for Thought

1. What are some examples of “the breach?”

2. Do you know a man who has left the Church? Why do you believe he left?



3. Do you know men who are still in the Church, but are discouraged and disengaged? Why do you think they are that way? What do you think may have happened?

4. What is your reaction to the phrase “God constantly overcomes evil with good?” Can you think of some examples of this?



5. What is your attitude towards the devil? Do you think he can influence your everyday life? Do you think he can actually affect society at large?

6. Section 395 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries - of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature - to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him."

What is your reaction to above quote? Faced with this reality, how would we find hope and perseverance?



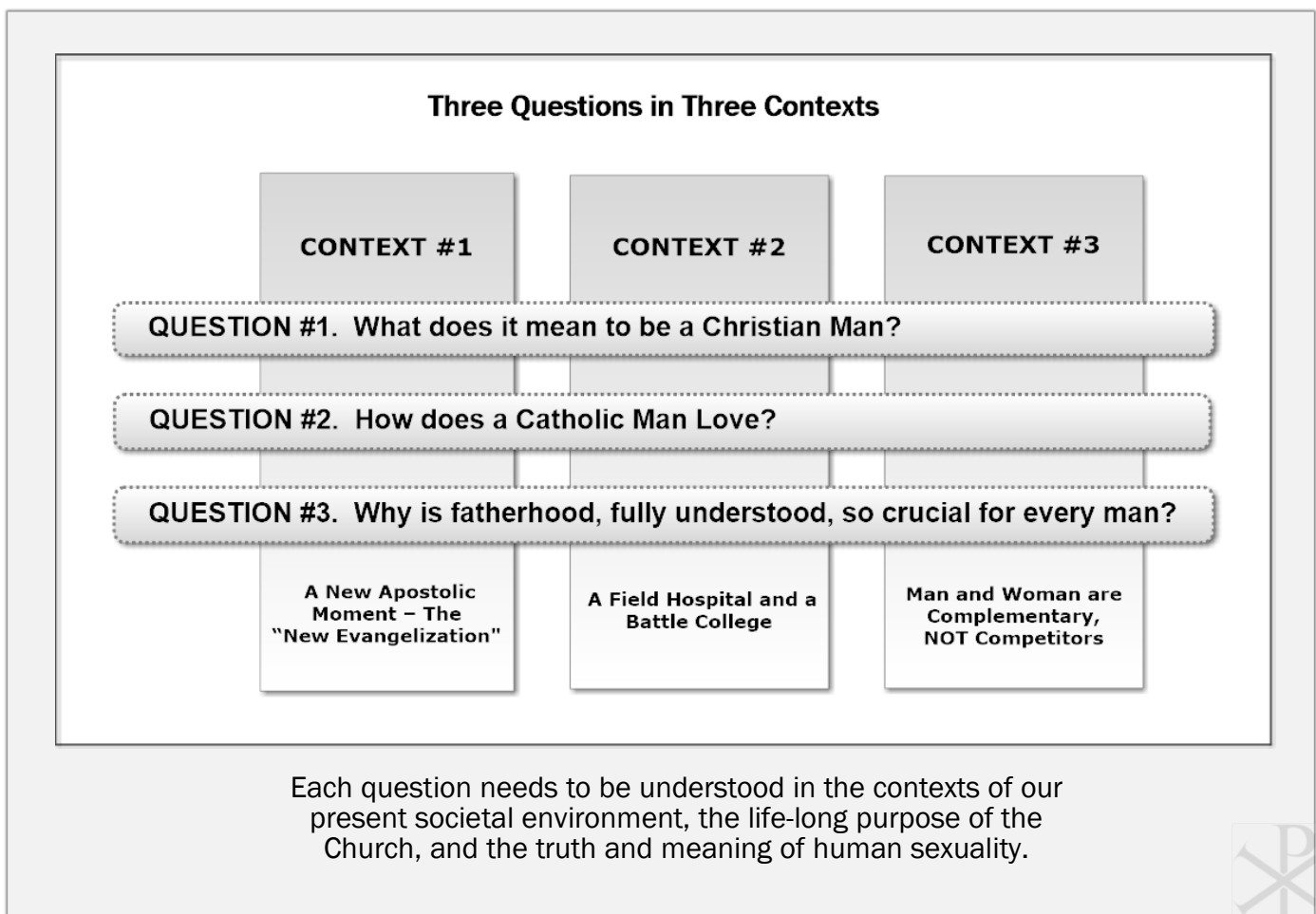
Purpose of this Exhortation

I offer this Exhortation as an encouragement, a challenge, and a *calling forth to mission* for every willing man in the Diocese of Phoenix: priests and deacons, husbands, fathers and sons, grandfathers and widowers, young men in preparation for your vocation – that is, each and every man. With this Exhortation, I want to clarify for you the nature of this mission from Christ, for which I will rely on the clear guidance of the Holy Scriptures, the Magisterium of the Church, and the example of the saints.

In this Exhortation, I will address ***three primary questions***:

1. What does it mean to be a Christian man?
2. How does a Catholic man love?
3. Why is fatherhood, fully understood, so crucial for every man?

Before addressing these three basic questions, it is important to put them into proper context. In the following section, I will explain ***three important contexts*** that help us understand the main questions.



Questions for Thought

7. What does it mean to encourage someone? Why is it important in God's plan? What is a good way to encourage another man?

8. How do you react to being challenged (e.g. by your spouse, boss, priest, friend)?



Context #1: A New Apostolic Moment – The “New Evangelization”

First, a new apostolic moment is upon us at this time in the history of the Church. The Holy Spirit is bringing about what recent popes have termed the “New Evangelization.” By evangelization, we mean the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by all means available, such as preaching, teaching, witnessing a fruitful and faithful family life, living celibacy for the sake of God’s Kingdom, employing media and other arts placed at the service of the Gospel. And what is new? The newness of our times is this: in the West, we find ourselves in the midst of competing cultures, particularly in cities and neighborhoods where the Gospel once permeated quite deeply. Jesus Christ’s Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16-20) to go out to the whole world and share the Good News has already happened where we live! This permeation of Western culture

The New Evangelization – Wanting to See, Hear, and Touch the Risen Lord

Passion “must be stirred up again in the hearts of Christians and in formerly Christian societies that have forgotten the joy that was entrusted to them. The believer who fails to pay attention to the thirst in his heart and who stops wanting to see, hear, and touch the risen Lord, allows the Word of Life to die in him. His heart becomes passionless, sad and old. And the Christian people or society that stops wanting to see, hear, and touch finds itself seeking infinity in ever more contradictory ways, faced eventually with the terrifying prospect of the human person unprotected by any ultimate affirmation of his dignity or worth.”

“Both the believer and the society whose faith has grown old and stale need passion, understood as far more than an emotion or passing of enthusiasm. In Pope St. John Paul II’s words, they need the “ardor” or “burning conviction” of people who have been enraptured by a surpassing beauty, who have been loved beyond their imaginings or hopes, and who are thus people who love. The call for a new evangelization is a call to realize now, in our time and with our lives, that Christianity is not just a piece of information or a historical fact. It is a Word addressed to us personally, and the Word is Life, it is a Love that abides. It is news so good and necessary that no human being who has encountered it can keep it to himself.”

What Is the New Evangelization?, Michelle K. Borras, 2012, Catholic Information Service, pp. 15-16

was once so deep that in a sense, it became part of the soil, and we still stand on that soil in certain ways. It is evident in current assumptions about life, which come directly from the Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian framework; assumptions regarding “fairness”, “equality”, “virtue”, “human dignity”, “compassion”, “representative government”, “the Golden Rule”, the “Ten Commandments”, the “hospital”, the “university”, and other clearly positive

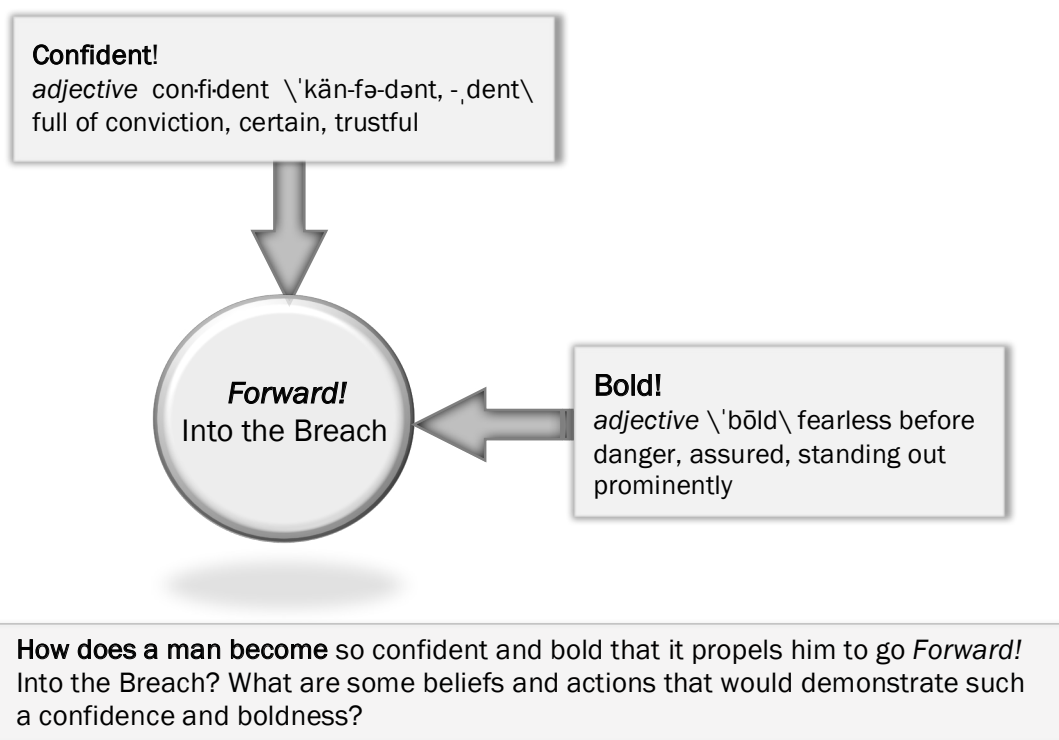
developments in the history of civilization. All this is our patrimony and inheritance from our spiritual ancestors. We find ourselves standing on this rich soil, where blessings are many because the Gospel has been taught here, received in faith, and put into practice.

Yet, at the same time, termites are hard at work in this soil. Here, in the developed desert of Arizona, we know termites well. Homebuilders know that no home built in our climate is entirely immune from these hungry, subterranean insects. Likewise, no culture – deeply Christian though it may be – is immune to the corruption of half-truths and hidden sin. Many fruits of our Christian heritage still exist, but the roots below the soil are under siege. Much about our culture

remains good and must be preserved, but it would be foolish to ignore the current and growing trends that threaten the remaining good, and dangerous to risk squandering the patrimony with which we have been blessed.

The answer and only ultimate solution is the New Evangelization of which we speak. Pope St. John Paul II, with whom I was blessed to work closely for nine years and who has inspired many men, reminds us of this needed response: “There is no solution to the social question apart from the Gospel.”² With this Exhortation, I gladly make his words my own; there is no solution to our cultural decline apart from the Gospel of Jesus.

This is daunting, perhaps, but surely an adventure. In the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus tells us, “Behold, I make all things new” (21:5) – that all things old and tired, sinful and broken, are renewed in his Incarnation, death, and Resurrection. Could this possibly be true? The answer is a resounding Yes! A true Catholic man stakes his whole life on this proposition – that all is made new in Jesus Christ. Our Lord has promised that He is and will always be with us. Thus, Catholic men across the centuries have responded to the call to enter the battle, ever ancient and ever new, and I have confidence that you will respond alike to fill the breach in our time. Be confident! Be bold! Forward, into the breach!



Questions for Thought

11. What is your reaction to the statement that “a new apostolic moment is upon us at this time in the history of the Church”? Do you believe that God intervenes in the lives of his people? If so, how?

12. What are some examples of competing cultures?



15. Does the Bishop's use of the word "patrimony" surprise you? Why do you think he chose that specific word?

16. What does this phrase mean to you? "A true Catholic man stakes his whole life on this proposition - that all is made new in Jesus Christ."



Leadership in Christ

Men are called to lead. Whether he may lead many or few each man has a leadership role within his vocation, be it marriage, Holy Orders, or as a single person.

One of the more remarkable aspects of life is discerning your vocation. If your discernment is true to the Lord's will, no matter what struggle you encounter you can be assured that you are living the most perfect life possible – i.e. a life towards sainthood, allowing you the best opportunity to be with God in heaven forever. This is so much so that if a man has clearly discerned his marriage to his wife and then wakes up one day asking himself if he married the right woman, the answer is of course he did! Because the question is like asking, “Did I have the right child?” Of course you did!

Want to be an effective leader in Christ? Then you must **be** Christ to others. As men of God, we serve as models to others for how Christ can and should be represented here on earth. As we live out our faith as leaders, the Gospel is proclaimed to those around us. And we don't always need to use words to convey the message of Christ either. Our attitudes and actions can, as the saying goes, speak louder than words.

Of course, living a virtuous life is vital. But two qualities are specifically important for leadership: humility and service. A man of Christ who wants to lead others effectively, must be a humble servant-leader. True authority comes from obedience. Jesus, the most authoritative man whoever walked on earth was a humble obedient servant. Jesus always obeyed his heavenly Father. If you desire to lead with authority, you need to be obedient to Jesus.

Leadership is manifested in decision-making. Decision-making is manifested in discernment. Discernment is manifested from our prayer life, our relationship with Jesus, and others whom the Lord has placed in our lives. In order to lead in Christ to the best of your ability, you have to pray, live a sacramental life, and serve to such an extent that in one way or another, it is a sacrifice for others. This is what Jesus did for us on the cross, and it is He whom we want to follow.

But wait, there's more! It is of the utmost importance as a leader to listen to and understand others in order to be effective. If we don't, then we just engage in a collective monologue where each person talks past the other, assisting neither. Humble servant-leaders must be willing to accept others and empathize with them. To accept another is to receive what they offer; to empathize is to identify with another. The common phrase “putting yourself in their shoes” captures the idea. A leader in Christ must be genuinely interested in and show care for those whom he leads.

Go forth men, lead with humility, lead with service! Lead in Christ!



Context #2: A Field Hospital and a Battle College

In his homilies, Pope Francis has described the Church today as “a field hospital after battle” – a constant source of mercy in order to endure and overcome wounds that we all bear. The Church is also the powerful source of Truth to heal men and prepare them to battle another day for Christ. Here in Phoenix as elsewhere, the Church is finding – though must redouble its efforts to find – the paths to healing for ourselves and the means to care for others who, like us, bear the mark of the Fall in debilitating ways, whether these wounds be physical or spiritual (addiction to pornography, alcohol, drugs, food, broken marriages, fatherlessness, and troubled family life). Our time calls for a renewal of the Church’s genius for physical and spiritual healing, given to her by the Holy Spirit. As Pope Francis says, the wounded are all around us, and “it is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal the wounds.”³ At the same time, the proclamation of the fullness of truth found in the Catholic Church is essential. This leads you, men, to live lives where sins do not cause festering wounds. Through Christ’s mercy and truth, we are healed and revitalized for battle. In Christ’s mercy and truth, we become strong in his strength, courageous with his courage, and can actually experience the *joie de guerre* of being soldiers for Christ.

Since the Church as “field hospital” after battle is an appropriate analogy, then another complementary image is appropriate for our day: the Spiritual Battle College. The Church is, and has always been, a school that prepares us for spiritual battle, where Christians are called to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6), to “put on the armor of God”, and “to be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).

“The Church is a constant source of mercy, to endure and to overcome wounds...it is Christ’s mercy and truth...given to us to become strong and courageous...to be formed by Christ, for being sent.”
Bishop Olmsted

Ever since Jesus chose the Twelve Apostles, formed them in his presence, and sent them out in his Name, He has continued to choose and form men through his Church and to send them out to the wounded. This is the meaning of the word *apostle* – men who are sent. With this letter, then, my sons and brothers, I urge you to heed Jesus’ call and to let him form your mind and heart with the light of the

Gospel *for the purpose of being sent*. That is why this letter is an *apostolic exhortation*. I am hereby exhorting you to step into the breach – to do the work of Christ’s soldiers in the world today.

Learning from The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13: 3-8, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 14-20; Luke 8:4-15

This story may be very familiar to many of us. After presenting scenarios for the sower and his seed, Jesus offers a spiritual explanation for each.

A sower went out to sow his seed and his sowing is known and visible to others. The seed is freely provided by the sower who acts independently from the ground. The seed is the word of God and the ground is the heart. The seeds fall to the soil by the action of the sower - that is, the words of the kingdom of God come to our hearts by the will of the God. Note that the ground is designed to receive the seed, the seed is designed to grow in the soil, and the seed is meant to transform into something that was not there before.

And so, Jesus tells us, some seeds fell along the path and were trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air came and devoured them. This describes hearing the word of the kingdom but not understanding it. Note the path is not a field, it is not a place that is conducive for growth. Thus, in this scenario, the person's heart is not a place conducive to receive and accept the word. We are told that some path goers, willingly or unwillingly, trampled on the seed. (Whom do you think the 'path goers' represent?) Birds also come to the seed on the path to devour it. "To devour" means that it is eaten quickly, or in the case of the word, destroyed rapidly and completely. We are told that this is the work of the evil one, the devil, Satan. Satan comes and snatches away what is sown in our hearts, so that we do not believe and are not saved. (How do you think Satan does this) Perhaps Jesus is warning us not to stray far from the Body of Christ and place ourselves in the near occasion of sin. That is, do not wander along a path that is purposely distant from God.

In the next two scenarios of the parable, some seeds fell on rocky ground and some among thorns. In the rocky ground, the seeds sprang up immediately - i.e., the word of God was accepted and received with joy. But as the plants grew, they had no depth of soil for a root to grow with them. Roots, of course, are necessary to provide moisture and a solid foundation for a plant. Consequently, when the sun rose, the plants became scorched and withered away. Likewise, in time of testing, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, those who were once joyous can quickly fall away. As for the seed that grew up alongside thorns, while some fruit is grown, it does not mature. Note that the thorns are always known to be there, but the plants have no choice but to grow along with them. This scenario describes people who are choked by the cares, riches, and pleasures of life as they go along their way. Their hearts are not focused on the word, but on the world. We must live in the world, but not be of the world.

In the final scenario, some seed fell into good soil, grew, and produced fruit that has patiently yielded thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. This is where people hear the word, accept it, understand it, and hold it fast in an honest and good heart. Notice the implication that the seed takes time to grow and mature. Remember patience is a virtue, and virtues need to become habits.

Meditate on these divinely inspired scenes and their individual characteristics, asking the Lord for insight into each of them. Using the language of the parable, what can you do to maintain good soil, provide water for the seed, and encourage a strong root, then patiently await the fruit?



Questions for Thought

17. Bishop Olmsted using the words of Pope Francis, describes the Church today as “a field hospital after battle,” and specifically, that it offers “a constant source of mercy in order to endure and overcome wounds that we all bear.” It is also “the powerful source of Truth to heal men and prepare them to battle another day for Christ.” How do you think this can occur?

18. St. Paul encourages us to “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12). In a post entitled “Spiritual Combat and Your Weapons of Choice,” which appeared at CatholicExchange.com on June 2, 2015, Fr. Ed Broom, OMV, offered the following advice:

Be vigilant. Stay awake and pray so that you are not put to the test and are overcome by the temptations of the devil. The precise reason for the Apostles’ fall, abandoning Jesus in the Garden, was that they were not vigilant in prayer.

Avoid the Near Occasion of Sin. Often we are tempted because we place ourselves in the near occasion of sin. Remember the many proverbs! Do not play with fire! And, he who plays in danger will perish in danger! He who walks on thin ice will fall in! One of the reasons why Eve ate from the forbidden fruit was simply because she was near the tree that God told her not to eat from.

What are some ways that you can put Fr. Broom’s advice into action?

19. Bishop Olmsted encourages us “to live lives where sins do not cause festering wounds.” He then lists some common areas: addictions to pornography, alcohol, drugs, food, the effects upon us of broken marriages, fatherlessness, and troubled family lives. Take some time in prayer and write out a personal inventory of the ways you are wounded and the particular sin patterns in your life. Ask the Lord to show you the path towards healing “in the fullness of truth found in the Catholic Church.”

20. “Through Christ’s mercy and truth, we are healed and revitalized for battle. In Christ’s mercy and truth, we become strong in his strength, courageous with his courage, and can actually experience the joie de guerre [joy of war] of being soldiers for Christ.” That is, we become different because of what we go through, the experience of sin and brokenness, and the receipt of the mercy of God and healing in our lives. Those who have experienced the healing power of Christ are called to witness to it. “Do not place a light under a basket, but on a stand and let it give light to all the house” (Matthew 5:15). Indeed, Bishop Olmsted urges each of us “to heed Jesus’ call and to let him form your mind and heart with the light of the Gospel for the purpose of being sent” and “to step into the breach to do the work of Christ’s soldiers in the world today.” Ask the Holy Spirit to provide you the opportunity to do this, and then share about your experiences.

Context #3: Man and Woman Are Complementary, not Competitors

The complementarity of masculinity and femininity is key to understanding how human persons image God. Without knowing and appreciating this, we cannot know ourselves or our mission as men, nor can women embrace their own vocations, confident in the Father's love.

Men and women are certainly different. Science increasingly deepens our understanding of this difference. Up until recently, we had little idea of the complex workings of hormones, chemical reactions, and the brain differences present in boys and girls, men and women, all in response to the presence of the XX or XY combination of chromosomes present at conception. For example, the significantly greater amount of corpus callosum (the connective nerve fibers between the two sides of the brain) in the average woman is a fascinating discovery, as is the way the male brain is typically more segmented in its functions. Studies show that on average, infant girls will look at the face of a silent adult twice as long as infant boys, more interested in the person by God's design.⁴ All these biological facts discovered by science add to our knowledge of the symphony of complementarity between man and woman, something at which we rightly wonder and in which we rejoice when we encounter the beauty of the sexual difference.

Created in the Image and Likeness of God

Men and women are persons endowed with intellect and will. Only human beings and angels are created persons. Dogs, cats, giraffes, and squirrels are certainly animated creatures. But only human beings have the singular privilege to procreate in God's image and likeness, and in doing so, God abides by His creation and imparts a unique and everlasting soul to be with Him for all time as the fruit of the union of a man and a woman.

God has designed men and women and their faculties to function in very specific ways. This is written into the very nature and heart of every human on earth. God made man and woman different by design, not by mistake. As soon as God created Eve and presented her to Adam, Adam knew no other creature was like Eve. When he saw her, he immediately recognized she had the same nature as he did, and because of this she had the same dignity as he did.

This difference is also a challenge, since misunderstanding can creep in and sin can cause us to lose respect for one another, robbing us of our hope for peaceful and fruitful collaboration between men and women. But this struggle between the sexes is not the fault of God's creation; it is the result of sin. Pope Francis puts it this way:

Man and woman are the image and likeness of God. This tells us that not only is man taken in himself the image of God, not only is woman taken in herself the image of God, but also man and woman, as a couple, are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not for opposition, or for subordination, but for communion and procreation, always in the image and likeness of God.⁵

Alongside this struggle, the rapid advance of a “gender ideology” has infected societies around the world. This ideology seeks to set aside the sexual difference created by God, to remove male and female as the normative way of understanding the human person, and in its place, to add various other “categories” of sexuality. This ideology is destructive for individuals and society, and it is a lie. It is harmful to the human person, and therefore, a false concept that we must oppose as Christians. At the same time, however, we are called to show compassion and provide help for those who experience confusion about their sexual identity. This confusion is not unexpected when the poison of secularism reaches such critical levels: “When God is forgotten, the creature itself becomes unintelligible.”⁶

“We must never underestimate the power of sin. We cannot fight sin on our own strength. We need the power of Jesus Christ in our lives to fight this battle. Satan is a crafty tempter, and we ourselves have an amazing ability to make excuses. We are ultimately responsible for our actions. The devil does not make us sin. We choose sin. That is why it is so difficult to understand our propensity to sin. We know what we should do, but we do not always do it.”

Spiritual Warfare for Catholics, Jeffrey J. Steffon, 1994, p.100



The damaging impact of this “gender ideology” on individuals and society was addressed at length this year by Pope Francis:

I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not... an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. In order to resolve the problems in their relationships, men and women need to speak to one another more, listen to each other more, get to know one another better, love one another more. They must treat each other with respect and cooperate in friendship.⁷

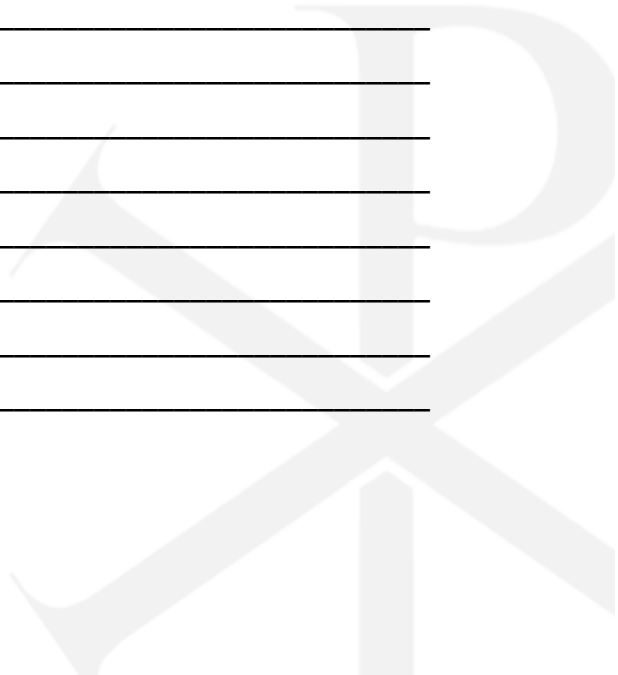
As Pope Francis reminds us all to “love one another more,” I exhort you, my sons and brothers in Jesus Christ, to embrace more deeply the beauty and richness of the sexual difference and to defend it against false ideologies.

Having now established the contexts in which to understand the questions addressed in this Exhortation, I will now respond to the above-stated questions themselves.

Question for Thought

21. Bishop Olmsted quotes Pope Francis as saying, “Man and woman are the image and likeness of God. This tells us that not only is man taken in himself the image of God, not only is woman taken in herself the image of God, but also man and woman, as a couple, are the image of God.” The Bishop also says that the struggle between the sexes is not the fault of God’s creation; it is the result of sin. How can a couple find relief from this struggle and together return to the image and likeness of God?

22. In Context #3, Bishop Olmsted discusses the “rapid advance of a “gender ideology” [that] has infected societies...” That is, an attempt to remove male and female as identities and replace them with various categories of sexuality. He clearly states the destructive nature of such and its harm to human persons. He ends this section with an exhortation to men to “embrace more deeply the beauty and richness of the sexual differences [between men and women] and to defend it against false ideologies.” What are ways in which you can defend the truth and meaning of man and woman as created by God?



Question 1: What does it mean to be a Catholic Man?

Ecce Homo – Behold *the* Man

Every man, particularly today, must come to a mature acceptance and understanding of what it means to be a man. This may seem obvious, but in our world, there are many distorted images and much evidence of confusion regarding what is true masculinity. We can say that for the first time in history, people have become either so confused or so arrogant as to attempt to dictate their masculinity or femininity according to their own definitions.

At one striking moment of Jesus' trial, Pontius Pilate, with all his worldly power, presented Jesus to the crowd with the words, Ecce homo – Latin meaning “Here is the man!” Thinking he was merely pointing to a man from Nazareth, he failed to recognize that he was pointing to *God made man* – the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth – who at once is fully God and fully man, and the perfection of masculinity. Every moment of his life on earth is a revelation of the mystery of what it means to be man – that is, to be fully human and also, the model of masculinity. Nowhere else can we find the fullness of masculinity as we do in the Son of God. Only in Jesus Christ can we find the highest display of masculine virtue and strength that we need in our personal lives and in society itself. What was visible in Christ's earthly life leads to the invisible mystery of his divine Sonship and redemptive mission. The Father sent his Son to reveal what it means to be a man, and the fullness of this revelation becomes evident on the Cross. He tells us that it was for this reason that He came into the world, that it is his earnest desire to give himself totally to us.⁸ Herein lies the fullness of masculinity; each Catholic man must be prepared to give himself completely, to charge into the breach, to engage in spiritual combat, to defend women, children, and others against the wickedness and snares of the devil!

Looking to what the secular world holds up as “manly” is in fact to look at shadows – or even at outright counterfeits – of masculinity. No athlete, no matter how many awards; no political

“Our greatest dignity, is to allow the Lord to be first in our lives.”

Fr. Joseph Rogers

leader, no matter the power he wields; no performer, business man, or celebrity, no matter how much adored; no physical attribute or muscle mass; no intelligence or talent; no prizes or achievements can bestow masculinity on a man. The idolatry of celebrities at this time is a particular temptation, but to build one's masculine identity on such

fleeting models is to build an identity on sand. My Catholic sons and brothers, we can only build a certain foundation for masculinity on the rock, Jesus Christ. We look to our Savior to be transformed in Him, to be the men we are called to be, and to let others see Him in us.

Yet we do not merely *look* to Jesus. We truly *encounter* Christ at Mass when we receive the very gift of Himself in the Eucharist. For this reason, I call upon my brother priests to awaken the sense of transcendence in the hearts of men through reverent and beautiful liturgy, helping men to rediscover Jesus in the Eucharist each and every Sunday. I ask my brother priests to teach the faithful about the powerful truth of the liturgy, especially in ways to which men can relate. Teaching men to understand the fullness and power of the Mass must be a top priority.

What a joy it is for men of God when they are led by priests who have a confident sense of their own masculinity, their call to participate in Christ's spousal love, and their generous, life-giving fatherhood!

The Three Lies of Satan

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:1-5 (ESV)

The first lie: Falsify reality. The serpent said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" But notice how Satan changed God's words. In Genesis 2:16-17, what God actually said was, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Distorting the truth that God reveals to us and that the Church presents to us is a primary tactic of Satan.

The second lie: God is not telling you the truth. "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'" Satan presents God's words as contrary to what we want. He leads us to think, "You will not go to Hell. It is not true that the way of sin leads to ruin and eternal damnation. In fact, it makes you freer to be who you are!" In this way, Satan presents God's command as a limit to our freedom.

The third lie: In reality, truth is how you define it. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Knowing good and evil means you now perceive directly what is true and what is false. In other words, what is good and what is evil is not based on what God says, but on what you decide. Each person gets to decide for himself what is good and what is evil. There is no objective truth. This men, is the lie of moral relativism.

What are some examples from our culture for each of these three lies? How easy or hard is it to believe them?



Questions for Thought

23. Bishop Olmsted starts this section with, "Every man must come to a mature acceptance and understanding of what it means to be a man." Men cannot ride out their lives and take what comes. We need to become who we are! To find out what that implies, we just have to look to Jesus. He is our model of masculinity in the true being of the Father, and Jesus lived that role every day of his life. "Herein lies the fullness of masculinity; each Catholic man must be prepared to give himself completely, to charge into the breach, to engage in spiritual combat, to defend women, children, and others against the wickedness and snares of the devil!" What is your reaction to such a bold statement? How can it possibly be achieved?

"The Father sent his Son to reveal what it means to be a man ... every moment of his life on earth is a revelation of the mystery of what it means to be man."

24. Celebrities are often looked upon as role models, and a great many people gravitate toward them. What do you believe makes people behave that way?

25. As we strive to build our masculine foundation on the rock of Jesus, we are called by Bishop Olmsted to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass. What are some ways that you can come to a greater encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist?

Saints, our Heroes of Faith

This is what our forefathers, the saints, have done for two millennia. As the Gospel reveals the reality of masculinity, we can also find it lived out in the heroic witness of the saints.

Saints are a kind of continuation of the Gospels and so give us examples of the varied paths of holiness. Thus, as Jesus shows us the perfection of masculinity, so we can also find it lived by the saints who were led by Christ. Just as an aspiring baseball player is inspired at the Baseball Hall of Fame, so must we men look to those who have gone before us, to look to them for inspiration and encouragement in fighting the good fight.

Think of the varied skills and talents of baseball players. A young person may dream to hit like Babe Ruth, catch and throw like Willie Mays, have the agility of Henry Aaron, the consistency and hard work of Lou Gehrig and Jackie Robinson. Young pitchers would dream of pitching like Cy Young and Randy Johnson. As they see each of these players play the game in different ways, they are inspired to a love of baseball.

Yet far greater than a ball game is what Catholic men seek. We look to the saints as to heroes, striving to live like Christ, united to Him and learning from Him at the same time. In a dramatic way to which we can relate, the saint's life says *Ecce homo!*, "Here is the man!" This is what St. Paul implies when he writes, "It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Each man should make a decision to have a patron Saint. While there are many more, I offer the names of ten saints with whom each and every Catholic man should become familiar. Next to each saint's name is listed the virtue with which he is associated, as well as the sin which opposes that virtue. When we identify our sin and the needed virtue, we can identify which saint's intercession will be particularly helpful:

- St. Joseph (*Trust in God* – selfishness)
- St. John the Baptist (*Humility* – arrogance)
- St. Paul (*Adherence to Truth* – mediocrity)
- St. Michael the Archangel (*Obedience to God* – licentiousness and rebelliousness)
- St. Benedict (*Prayer and Devotion to God* – sloth)
- St. Francis of Assisi (*Happiness* – moralism)
- St. Thomas More (*Integrity* – double-mindedness)
- Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (*Chastity* – lust)
- St. Josemaría Escrivá (*Boldness* – worldly fear)
- Pope St. John Paul II (*Defending the Weak* – passivity)

Virtue Is Strength

Virtues represent the perfection of Christ, while vices are imperfections. How do you develop a virtue? By performing the good actions in relationship to it. If you're continuously working on the virtues, you are more likely to exhibit them. Virtues actually undo vice. If you have an area of difficulty in your life, it may mean you have to work on the corresponding virtue in that area. For example, if you eat too much, you may need to work on temperance. Do you lie a lot? Then work on the virtue of honesty. Depending on your situation, you may immediately know what you need to do about it. Of course, Satan and his demons don't like you working on developing the virtues. Why? Because it makes you more Christ-like and that much more difficult to tempt.

Exorcist Fr. Chad Ripperger* says that one of the principal ways demons get a foothold into people is through violations of sexual purity. So for a man developing the virtue of chastity, custody of the mind is very, very important. Speaking of purity, Fr. Ripperger further states there are three types of purity. The first type is purity of action (the sixth commandment against adultery). The second type is purity of the mind (the ninth commandment against coveting your neighbor's wife). The third is different. It's purity in the sense of cleanliness, or freedom from contaminants, even stainlessness. It means to not let anything into your faculties except God. In a word, it's immaculacy. And who is immaculate? The Blessed Virgin Mary, who wholly accepted God (Luke 1:38). This is why she is hated and even feared by Satan so much. Satan and the demons are the inversion of her purity. They rejected God and held onto creation and because of that they are constantly trying to make us impure like them.

*Spiritual Warfare Video, *Fr. Chad Ripperger*, Rochester, NH, October 5, 2015

We don't even need to look to the distant past to find heroes of the faith. We witnessed St. John Paul II forgive his would-be assassin, and after recovering his health, continue tirelessly to call the world to "open wide the doors to Christ."⁹ Time and again, he exhorted us, "Be not afraid!" Today in parts of the world where persecution rages, we are seeing courageous witnesses of truth in the recent martyrs of Syria, Nigeria, Iraq, and other war-torn countries. We remember our twenty-one Coptic brothers who, just this past winter, were beheaded on a beach in Egypt, and as Pope Francis noted, "*only because they confessed Christ.*"¹⁰

Men, we must never believe that holiness and courage are things of the past! You and I are called to a holiness that shows Christ to the world as our forefathers have done countless times throughout history, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in this time of evil's growing boldness, each man must prepare himself for nothing less than martyrdom, whatever form this may take, and to instill in his children and grandchildren the willingness to do the same.

Will the Lord not continue to inspire men? Of course He will, and He continues to do so! Our concern is not if the Lord will give us the required strength, but how He is doing so right now. How is His Spirit moving us to rise up and reject passivity in a culture of fatherlessness? How is He now giving us interior strength in a culture of pornography? How is He now inspiring us to

look beyond ourselves and our technology to the peripheries where Christ is needed? How is the Lord inspiring you and me, right now, to cast aside concerns for our own comfort, to serve our fellow man, to put out into the deep, to step into the breach?

I strongly encourage your familiarity with the lives of the saints. Just as a young baseball player would lack much having never studied the greats enshrined in Cooperstown, so we lack much if we are ignorant of the saints who have preceded us to the infinitely more glorious Halls of Heaven.

From One Dad to Another

Some parishes are really vibrant, and some are sort of flat. For a while I attended a perfectly longitudinal parish. I would come to church week after week, and practically nobody would say hello before or after Mass, even during the donut social. Yes, people were polite, but no one ever reached out and introduced themselves, and it just made me mad. I would say to myself, "Isn't this God's house? I just don't get it. Aren't we supposed to love and care for one another?" Then the Lord very clearly asked me in my heart, "How many people have you reached out to, said hello to, and showed a genuine interest in?"

Oh.

So then I did. Not to everyone at once, but if you ask the Lord for someone to be put in your path, you'll be surprised at what could happen. I was.

At the time we had a number of small children and often brought all of them to Mass. When I would see another family with small kids too, I would approach the dad after the Mass. Usually he and his family were still in the pew getting ready to leave. I told him that he had a beautiful family (which was true) and that for myself I knew how special it is when the whole family attends Mass together (which is definitely true). That's it. No big deal speech. Just sharing from the heart of one dad to another. And from that simple exchange both of us dads received a real grace from the Lord.



Questions for Thought

26. Bishop Olmsted draws a corollary from baseball where a fan watching different players use their varied skills in numerous positions on the field, observes that the game is played in different ways by different people, but it's all still baseball. Similarly, the saints each strived in their lives to be like Christ, to be united to Him, and to learn from Him. But they did so in different ways and thus experienced different areas of healing and virtue. Therefore, the Bishop suggests that each man have a patron saint in whom he can identify a needed virtue. Bishop Olmsted lists ten saints and their corresponding virtues for our consideration (p. 27). How will you go about finding a patron saint?

27. How is Jesus continuing to inspire men today as He has done in the past? How is His Spirit moving us to rise up and reject passivity in a culture of fatherlessness?

The Catholic Man's Identity

I wish now to speak to you about our identity in Christ. Most of the holy men I mentioned above lived in times quite different than our own. They had different challenges and different callings, but all had one thing in common: Jesus Christ, who gave them their true identity! Here we recall the wisdom of the Second Vatican Council: "Jesus Christ reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear."¹¹

In subtle ways, we are tempted to look elsewhere for our identity. The opinions of others, the success of our careers, the number of possessions, toys, sports, hobbies, clothing, tattoos, homes, and cars – these are all ways that tempt us to label or identify ourselves in ways outside of Christ. While some of these must be a part of life to an extent, they are not the core of our being. Having been purchased by the blood of the Lamb, "our citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The world cannot possibly give us our true identity; "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). We must be aware of being distracted by false identities and remain grounded in Jesus Christ.

Simply put, *our identity is caught up in the identity of the eternal Son of God*. It is received at our baptism as it was clearly exclaimed at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River: "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). When we speak of conversion, we are speaking about an acceptance of and growth into this identity. When we speak about sin, we are speaking of all that takes us away from our identity as beloved sons of the Father. Since this is our identity – being beloved sons of God the Father – is it surprising that the devil is waging a fierce battle on masculinity and fatherhood in our day? The process of Christian conversion includes coming to know God's love and experiencing brotherhood with Christ who deepens our identity as sons of the Father in the Holy Spirit. This is our lifelong goal and our spiritual battle.



Questions for Thought

30. As Bishop Olmsted says, the world cannot give us our true identity. Why not? Because being created in the image and likeness of God, we cannot receive our identity from creation! Our true identity is being beloved sons of God the Father. Therefore, is it surprising that the devil is waging a fierce battle on masculinity and fatherhood in our day? Here's a key question: How would you explain this to another person?

31. Establishing and maintaining our identity as men in Christ is our main spiritual battle. Use the space below to reflect on these words of Bishop Olmsted:

“The process of Christian conversion includes coming to know God’s love and experiencing brotherhood with Christ who deepens our identity as sons of the Father in the Holy Spirit. This is our lifelong goal and our spiritual battle. ... When we speak of conversion, we are speaking about an acceptance of and growth into this identity [as beloved sons of the Father]. When we speak about sin, we are speaking of all that takes us away from our identity as beloved sons of the Father.”

Beloved and Free Sons, Called to the Battle Within

Let us look to John the Apostle and Beloved Disciple for insights into this battle. In his first Letter to the Church, St. John speaks of the three-fold temptation faced by all of us: temptations to the passions of the flesh, to possessiveness, and to pride (1 John 2: 16-17). Are not all sins tied to these three temptations? John puts his finger on the battles that each of us must fight within ourselves. In fact, Christ fights specifically against these temptations during His encounter with Satan in the desert (Matthew 4), and then gives us instruction in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) on how we are to fight against them.

Turning away from the passions of the flesh, Jesus rejected Satan's offering of bread in the desert, and in the Sermon on the Mount, twice He instructs us to fast (Matthew 6:16). Notice that the Lord does not say "*if* you fast" but rather "*when* you fast." Fasting is training in self-knowledge, a key weapon for mastery over oneself. If we do not have dominion over our passions, especially those for food and sex, we cannot possess ourselves and put the interests of others in front of our own.

Tempting Jesus to possessiveness, Satan offered Him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" (Matthew 4:8), but once again, Jesus refused. This shows us that Christ calls us to freedom from the temptation to gain the world at the cost of our souls. Often, Satan tempts not through persons but through objects like a car, a house, or the latest high-speed technologies. There is no shortage of messages that tempt us to grasp for happiness through possessions. We recall how the Rich Young Man left his encounter with Jesus as "sad" because "he had many possessions" (Luke 18:23). Pope Francis reminds us, "The emptier the person's heart is, the more he or she needs to buy, own, and consume."¹² With Jesus, we are called to seek out, not to "settle for," a simplicity of life which frees us for our mission in Christ.

In Satan's third attack upon Jesus in the desert, the Lord was tempted to pride. Satan enticed our Lord to use his power for selfish purposes, but Jesus rejected this cross-less glory and chose the path of humility. In the Sermon on the Mount, He exhorts us to humility not once but twice when He repeats, "when you pray" (Matthew 6:5). Indeed, the greatest protection from pride and self-reliance is turning humbly to God in prayer. The new technologies of social media where we can constantly display and discuss ourselves can lead to a type of idolatry that consumes us. Honest prayer will keep us grounded and help us to avoid this temptation.

Men, this need for pastors to challenge men to the battle within, to the richness of a committed interior life with God, is nothing new. Listen to the words of St. John Paul II, when as Archbishop of Krakow he spoke to college students in 1962:

"We are quite ready to take, or conquer, in terms of enjoyment, profit, gain and success—and even in the moral order. Then comes the question of giving, and at this point we hang back, because we are not prepared to give. The element which is so characteristic under other forms in the spiritual portrait of women is barely perceptible in men. . . . We have a tendency toward the Nicodemus type of religious attitude, toward the type of

devotion which is characterized maybe only by superficial discretion but very often also by fear of what others might think. . . . This male Catholicism is not interior and deep enough; the male believer does not have a true interior life. . . . we men do not have a deep enough interior life.”

The human being is a creature, and therefore in relation to God a receiver of love and courage before he or she can give it away to others. *Nemo potest dare quod non habet* is the famous term the Church developed in Latin for this fundamental truth. *You cannot give what you do not have*. Mary our Mother, the great Receiver of God’s love in her very body is the model for us as Catholics, but not only Mary—every great Saint, that is, great lover in the history of our Church. There is no shortcut to holiness, to being the great Catholic men we are called to be. There is no short-cut past the age-old *interior fight* that each of us must engage!

Through Temptations We Can Atone for Past Sins

In *How to Resist Temptation* (Sophia Institute Press, 2001) Fr. Francis J. Remler, C.M., comments - “Our past indulgences in forbidden pleasures might easily become the source of lifelong and persistent temptations to renewed indulgence. This is a very painful and trying condition for those who have truly repented and are seeking to lead a virtuous life. But they can console themselves by reflecting that this very state of temptation, troublesome and hard though it is, furnishes excellent opportunities for making atonement and satisfaction to Divine Justice for their evil deeds of earlier years.”

For every temptation there is an actual grace given. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Strength is made perfect in weakness? Correct! In this world virtue cannot take root without the help of temptation. Otherwise there would be no virtue.



As we develop in receiving God’s love and mercy in prayer and sacrament, the Lord gives us sure weapons in the “good fight” St. Paul names when he writes:

Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the Gospel of peace. In all circumstances hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:11-17)

The Armor of God - Ephesians 6:11-17

To place the belt of truth upon oneself means to live in the truth of Jesus Christ. To place the breastplate of justice upon oneself means to live in the justice of God. To place the Gospel of peace upon oneself as footgear is to be the peace of Christ to everyone we meet. To take up the shield of faith and ward off the fiery darts of Satan means to believe in the power of God. To place the helmet of salvation upon oneself is to protect one's thoughts. To take up the sword of the Spirit is to read and meditate upon the Word of God. In addition to the armor of God, ask Jesus everyday to cover you and your loved ones with His precious blood. Along with this, ask for the intercession of Mary the Mother of God and the protection of her mantel. Finally, each of us should include the angels and saints in our petition for protection, especially our guardian angel.

Spiritual Warfare for Catholics, Jeffrey J. Steffon, 1994, (p. 155)



We may be tempted to say, “When I get this three-fold battle behind me, I can start living the life of holiness,” but this is a lie! It is precisely in the course of this fight that we become holy. As Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati said, “To live without faith, without a patrimony to defend, without a steady struggle for truth – that is not living, but existing.” Are you and I merely existing? Or are we living our Christian faith as *men fully alive*? Recall the famous words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: “You were not made for comfort; you were made for greatness.” Any greatness that we might merit as Catholic men depends upon this fight for holiness. It is the same fight Jesus Christ fought in the desert and the same fight our Christian forefathers fought in order to hand down the faith. Woe to us if we do not pick up the weapons of the Spirit – offered to us freely – and accept them bravely and gratefully! Courage, confidence, and humble reliance on God’s infinite resources are called for here as we engage. Forward! *Into the breach!*

Freedom, License, and Conscience

Freedom is different from license. If each of us exercised personal license to do as we wished, there would be chaos all around us and we would be trampling on the societal freedom of others (for example, why do we stop at red lights?). Freedom, however, has a context other than liberty. Jesus said he came to set the captives free (cf. Luke 4:18). Free from what, and free to do what? Free to choose bacon instead of sausage for breakfast? No, this freedom is greater than that. It is freedom from the bondage of sin and freedom to live our lives in Christ! This freedom is the heart of the Christian life.

Unfortunately, many people say “I am following my conscience, so therefore I’m okay,” and in all sincerity they truly believe that they are doing the right thing. But when people are spiritually blind they often don’t know it and come become more and more blinded by the deceptions of Satan. As we are warned by Cardinal Raymond Burke,* we must be attentive to a false notion of conscience, which would actually use the conscience to justify sinful acts and betray our call to holiness. Conscience does not set each of us apart as an arbiter of what is right and good, but unites us in the pursuit of one truth. Therefore, the fact that we have a conscience at all means that there is indeed one objective truth established by the creator who Himself is truth.

Counseling the doubtful and admonishing the sinner are spiritual works of mercy. But much care needs to be taken when explaining to our brothers and sisters that in order to exercise their conscience, it has to be formed in accordance with objective truth and right reason. Unfortunately, as Steve Bollman explains, only 15% of Catholics allow the Church to guide them when it comes to moral decision-making, whereas 85% say they follow their own conscience, a conscience largely formed by the media.# Cardinal Burke adds that our conscience must be trained to listen to God’s voice alone and to reject what would weaken or compromise it. We attain a well formed conscience through our daily prayer and devotion and through our study of magisterial Church teaching. In this way our conscience is formed according to the will of God and according to His law which is life for us. A well-formed conscience gives you peace. An ill-formed conscience gives you excuses that will sit in the back of your mind and atop your heart.

**Conscience, The Infallible Guide to Holiness of Life*. Raymond Cardinal Burke, The Wanderer, January 28, 2016

Steve Bollman, *That Man Is You!*, Session 15. Paradisus Dei



Questions for Thought

32. Jesus teaches us that in order to turn away from the flesh, possessiveness, and pride (cf. 1 John 2:16-17), we need to fast (cf. Matthew 6:16). Bishop Olmsted’s exhortation states, “Fasting is training in self-knowledge, a key weapon for mastery over oneself. If we do not have dominion over our passions, especially those for food and sex, we cannot possess ourselves and put the interests of others in front of our own.” How often do you fast? Do you find it easy or hard?

33. Do you “grasp for happiness through possessions?” We may say to ourselves, “If I just had this ‘thing’ I would be happy, my life would be easier, I would no longer stress out, and I would be different, I would love my wife and kids more, I would no longer kick the wall, etc. etc.” How easy, or hard, would it be to give up buying “things” that you believe will make you happy? Is it possible that gathering a multitude of “things” will actually complicate your life, rather than simplify and help it?

Your Prayer Time - Something Worth Fighting For

When you want to get know someone you make an effort to be present with them and engage in conversation, right? It's no different with God, only we don't have to schedule an appointment. Scripture attests to the fact that our God is a personal God and He desires a relationship with his creatures. A genuine relationship with God is not just some abstract knowledge of a deity.

God calls everyone to know Him personally. In a homily given March 26, 2006, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI put it this way, "Christianity is not an ideology, but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ." However, this requires effort. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. ... The "spiritual battle" of the Christian's new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer. (CCC 2725)

Prayer is your lifeline. It's called a "prayer life" because everything you do in life depends on your time in prayer. If we do not regularly spend time alone with God, there will be something missing in our lives.

Choose a suitable duration for your prayer and find the right place. Half the battle of prayer is to have a regular daily time and place for your prayer time.

Many suggest that a prayer time have a simple structure, and have found it to be an aide when times of dryness inevitably come. Dryness consists of not experiencing the presence of God or the desire to pray: God may seem absent or distant, and we may feel that we just are talking to ourselves. But He is always there!

Be mindful that prayer is not a negotiation with God. It's not "Listen Lord, your servant is speaking," but instead entrusting our needs and cares to Him. When approaching your prayer time, clear your mind of distractions. Not getting bogged down in misleading thoughts is important. It's an attack strategy from the devil. Here's a counter-attack technique: Write down all the things that you can't get out of your head during your prayer time, then draw a large cross across them all and ask the Holy Spirit to free you of those thoughts and images so you can present yourself to Him undistracted. And although it might sound silly, stay awake! How many times have you begun to pray and all of a sudden you start yawning? Be mindful about staying alert and focused.

Lastly, listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. God speaks to us through the Scriptures, through the Magisterium, and also directly to our hearts.

Remember God is waiting **for you**, always.



The Practices of a Committed Catholic Man

Given these reflections on Catholic manhood, we move to the practical, that is, how to live like a Catholic man. What practices can help us to take up our cross and follow our King?

If we think of soldiers who do not remain in strong physical and mental shape and who fail to practice the essential combat arts, we know they will not be ready for battle and will be a danger to themselves and their comrades in arms. The same is true for Catholic men; those who do not prepare and strengthen themselves for spiritual combat are incapable of filling the breach for Christ.

While there are many habits and devotions that a Catholic man can form, I charge you with keeping these seven basic practices on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. If these practices are not (yet) part of your life, start now!

DAILY

1. **Pray every day.** Each Catholic man must start his day with prayer. It is said, “Until you realize that prayer is the most important thing in life, you will never have time for prayer.” Without prayer, a man is like a soldier who lacks food, water, and ammunition. Set aside some time to speak with God first thing each morning. Pray the three prayers essential to the Catholic faith: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. Pray also at every meal. Before food or drink touches your lips, make the Sign of the Cross, say the “Bless us, O Lord” prayer, and end with the Sign of the Cross. Do this no matter where you are, with whom or how much you are eating. Never be shy or ashamed about praying over meals. Never deny Christ the gratitude that is due to Him. Praying as a Catholic man before every meal is a simple but powerful way to keep strong and fill the breach.
2. **Examine your conscience before going to sleep.** Take a few moments to review the day, including both your blessings and sins. Give God thanks for blessings and ask forgiveness for sins. Say an Act of Contrition.
3. **Go to Mass.** Despite the fact that attending weekly Mass is a Precept of the Church, only about one in three Catholic men attend Sunday Mass. For large numbers of Catholic men, their neglect to attend Mass is a grave sin, a sin that puts them in mortal danger. The Mass is a refuge in the Spiritual Battle, where Catholic men meet their King, hear His commands, and become strengthened with the Bread of Life. Every Mass is a miracle where Jesus Christ is fully present, a miracle that is the high point not only of the week, but of our entire lives on Earth. In the Mass, a man gives thanks to God for his many blessings and hears Christ send him again into the world to build the Kingdom of God. Fathers who lead their children to Mass are helping in a very real way to ensure their eternal salvation.
4. **Read the Bible.** As St. Jerome so clearly tells us, “Ignorance of the Sacred Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” When we read God’s word, Jesus is present. Married men, read with

your wife and your children. If a man's children see him read the Scriptures, they are more likely to remain in the Faith. My brothers in Christ, this I can assure you: men who read the Bible grow in grace, wisdom, and peace.

WEEKLY

5. **Keep the Sabbath.** From the creation of Adam and Eve, God the Father established a weekly cycle ending with the Sabbath. He gave us the Sabbath to ensure that one day out of seven we will give thanks to God, rest, and be refreshed. In the Ten Commandments, God asserts anew the importance of keeping the Sabbath.

With today's constant barrage of buying and selling and the cacophony of noisy media, the Sabbath is God's respite from the storm. As Catholic men, you must begin, or deepen, keeping the holiness of the Sabbath. If you are married, you must lead your wives and children to do the same. Dedicate the day to rest and true recreation, and avoid work that is not necessary. Spend time with family, attend Mass, and enjoy the gift of the day.

MONTHLY

6. **Go to Confession.** At the very start of Christ's public ministry, Jesus calls on all men to repent. Without repentance from sin, there can be no healing or forgiveness, and there will be no Heaven. Large numbers of Catholic men are in grave mortal danger, particularly given the epidemic levels of pornography consumption and the sin of masturbation. My brothers, get to Confession now! Our Lord Jesus Christ is a merciful King who will forgive those who humbly confess their sins. He will not forgive those who refuse. Open your soul to the gift of our Lord's mercy!
7. **Build fraternity with other Catholic men.** Catholic friendship among men has a dramatic impact on their faith lives. Men who have bonds of brotherhood with other Catholic men pray more, go to Mass and Confession more frequently, read the Scriptures more often, and are more active in the Faith. Proverbs tells us: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (27:17). I call on each of our priests and deacons to draw men together in their parishes and to begin to rebuild a vibrant and transforming Catholic fraternity. I call on laymen to form small fellowship groups for mutual support and growth in the faith. There is no friendship like having a friend in Christ.

Strength Through Repentance: In Luke 22 Jesus tells Peter that he will deny Him three times, and then says "but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:32) Through repentance and forgiveness we can 'turn back', and in doing so we gain a strength. With this strength we can witness to others about the mercy and love of God, because we have experienced it ourselves, and in doing so encourage and strengthen them.



Building Fraternity with Other Catholic Men

Men were asked why they attend a Catholic men's group. Below are their responses.

- It's very clear to me that we need to band together to confront the challenges facing our world today. I agree with the "we are in a war" metaphor, only it's not just a metaphor. We are in a real spiritual battle about the most basic of levels of good versus evil. It's really a simple concept and I can't help but see more and more examples of the family being on the losing end. I realized I could not stand by and just let it happen.
- Walking into that room the first day, I was very much the outsider...yet everywhere I went, guys introduced themselves, asked me about myself, and were generally interested in who I was as a man of God...not as a job title! The respect, the care, and just their sheer commitment to seeking God has been such a refreshing blessing to me. Now I don't feel like an outsider and I feel like I could share anything and I would be respected, understood and supported.
- If you are wondering if you should take the plunge, I would say don't be afraid, there are men right in your parish that will help and support you. We need all men to step up and take a chance, your family is waiting.
- I come to the meetings to get to know other men who recognize the value of our faith. To seek, alongside other men, the path to God's eternal home for our loved ones and ourselves, and to share with, and learn from others on how to best carry out a man's duty and privilege of being protectors, lovers and providers to those entrusted to us, is a gift.
- A Catholic men's group is the most meaningful fraternal fellowship that a man can have. Really. The enjoyment of this experience speaks to what God intended for us, that we be in communion with one another. What could be more fruitful than spending time directing our thoughts toward our Lord and working with other men to come closer to Him?
- I need the support of like-minded men who share in the desire to bring themselves and their families to God's great riches. Sharing and learning with other men who have the burning desire to live as men of God is a great inspiration to me. I look forward to the weekly meetings to spiritually invigorate me and give me the strength to continue my faith journey.
- I have always heard that I needed to learn more about my faith and dig a little deeper into our Catholic teachings, and these meetings help with that. It's definitely an opportunity to challenge myself to try something new and step outside my comfort zone.

(continued)



Building Fraternity with Other Catholic Men (continued)

- It's true that everything in life takes work. Playing a sport or exercising gets better the more you do it. Doing the work, although it requires effort, is ultimately very satisfying. No different here. Getting up early in the morning on Saturday is work, but I have not had a day when I went back home anything less than grateful.
- Just like in physical battle, knowing that you are part of an army, and you have comrades in arms helps you to keep your morale high, and gives you some additional hope for the fight. Every time I think of the men who are with me on Saturday morning, it reminds me that I am not alone in fighting Satan. I realize that we are a unit in God's army. Seeing how it all just resonates with the men gives me great hope.
- Why do I go to the men's meeting week after week? Because I have discovered a pearl of great price – I stumbled upon something very valuable, something I desperately needed when I didn't even know that I needed it. I didn't realize how hungry my soul had become. Hungry for what? A new and extremely rewarding experience of brotherhood. Up until that point, I was quite satisfied being self-sufficient. I guess I just didn't realize how much my heart yearned to have close brotherly relationships. There was a great big hole in my heart and now I am thrilled to have brothers I can lean on, and whom I can open up my life to. It is a complete JOY to have Catholic brothers, to encourage, support, and build each other up!
- As a Catholic man, I sometimes take my faith for granted. Attending the men's group is a way to rediscover Jesus not just for my own sake, but my children, my family, friends, co-workers, for the sake of my local church community, for society at large and all the world. Anyone who feels like he needs a new beginning, a Catholic men's group is a highly recommended way to rediscover Jesus.
- I decided to go to the men's meeting because I felt like I wanted to be attentive to what God is asking of me. When I was invited, I decided to attend at least once so that I could be open to God's will. I know that the Holy Spirit works in ordinary ways, so I didn't want to ignore the people who were sent, perhaps unwittingly, to call me to the right path. Now, I come each week.
- I take confidence from knowing that there are other men who share my faith, and who are with me in spirit during the week, supporting me by their prayers in my role as a believer, a husband, and a father.



Question 2: How does a Catholic man love?

Now let us consider masculine love. This is not easy to do because the word love has almost lost its meaning in today's society. It is a word that men have even become uncomfortable using. Why is this? What does the word now imply? A mere feeling? Something passing? A four-letter word useful for marketing and greeting cards but for little else?

Christ makes clear that central to His mission is love. "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12) He says with passion, but without a hint of sentimentality. All of our Lord's teachings boil down to this command. Love is not a side-job; it is the mission itself. Yet, we can only love as we are created, and therefore, we can only love as men. So, how do men love?

For decades now, a model for manhood has been fashioned in the fictional British spy character named James Bond. Various actors have taken turns portraying this man who, in several adventures, has proposed what it means to be "manly," yet Bond remains an enigma. Like the women that he uses in the films, the ones who watch him find themselves wanting to know him. He is never a father, nor does he accept responsibility for or love one woman. In him, we see a man whose relationships are shallow and purely utilitarian. Indeed, "James Bond is a male character whose name is the height of irony. He is 40 years old and has no bonds. He is actually pathetic."¹³

How different this is from Jesus Christ! Is there fear in Him? Not in the least! Who is more of a man, the one who runs away or the one who can face the responsibilities and challenges of relationships, family, and intimacy? Could a man fearful of self-gift be a true disciple of Christ? In fact, can such a man love at all?

James Bond's name is the height of irony because he is a man with no bonds. Yet true masculine love will always build bonds! On the Cross and through the Eucharist, Jesus gives his very blood to bind us to Himself in love. At the Last Supper, offering us the Eucharist, His prayer to the Father is "that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:11). As He proclaims, His committed, binding love will "draw all men to himself" (John 12:32). In its Latin root, the word religion implies "binding together." Thus, it is no wonder that in a culture of broken bonds, so fearful of commitment, we often hear, "I'm spiritual, but not religious." Satan is also "spiritual, but not religious"! A man who lives life without a single, self-giving bond in his life deserves our pity, not our admiration.

In this context, I must mention what is called machismo and call Catholic men to rise above this tendency. The display of machismo attempts to seek safety in an image of toughness and emotionless living. However, it is merely a thin outer mask covering a deep inner fear of true bonds with others, bonds that come with true relationship and make one's life rich and meaningful. Behind the mask, as any mature person can see, is a man stuck in adolescent fear of vulnerability. In most cases, he has himself been badly hurt and is repeating a cycle learned in childhood.

Instead, the true love of Christ is centered on willing the good of the other, on pouring oneself out in charity for others. This is how the Son reveals the Father's love: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15: 9, 12). In Christ, we see that sacrifice is at the heart of love. Only the man who has fought the interior battle of self-mastery against sterility, the man who lays down his life for others, can avoid stagnancy and self-absorption. Never doubt that this sacrifice is worth the suffering! Our Lord encourages men in saying, "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

In the Name of Jesus, a Sacred Reality is Evoked

In our religious practices we often hear "In the name of" The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "Respect for [God's] name is an expression of the respect owed to the mystery of God himself and to the whole sacred reality it evokes" (CCC 2144). Let me emphasize that: When God's name is used, a sacred reality is evoked. In the Semitic world, to call upon someone's name was to make present all who they were. It's also a reason why the second commandment reminds us not to take the name of the Lord God in vain. So when we declare "In the name of Jesus Christ ..." we are accessing a very privileged role as God's children. We are declaring in faith for all in creation (both visible and invisible) to hear that we believe in the Son of God, we believe in all He did for us, and we declare Him as Lord over all creation. When this is done in faith, the spiritual world takes notice! Therefore, we have the ability to call upon the name of Jesus in times of trouble and temptation. Do it, invoke the sacred reality of your Lord and Savior, and renounce the devil. For example: *In the name of Jesus, I renounce this temptation of...*, *In the name of Jesus, I renounce the spirit of...*, *In the name of Jesus, I renounce...*



Three Masculine Loves: Friend, Husband, Father

1. A Friend in Christ – Bands of Brothers

At the very inception of his ministry here on earth, Jesus called other men to join Him. What was He teaching us here? We see that Jesus called His disciples to Himself in such a way that they would form deep bonds of friendship and brotherhood. At the last supper, He specifically said to them, “No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what the Master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). This friendship with God is possible, a true brotherhood with Jesus, because we have the same Father. Do you, my sons, have true brothers in Christ in your life?

Throughout all of history, including the history of Christianity, important movements were spurred on by bands of brothers, friends in Christ. The Early Church Fathers St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Basil were great friends and co-workers in the defense of Christ as they stood for the truth and defeated early heresies threatening the Church. St. Benedict and his monastic companions established communities of men that preserved and furthered Western culture in the face of barbarian destruction. This veritable fortress protecting truth, goodness, and beauty was built upon the stable and rich life of Christian brotherhood and friendship. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic each started bands of brothers in service to the poor and in defense of the truth. The early founders of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier, influenced countless other men, brought about great renewal in the Church, and evangelized to the furthest reaches of the world. In the 20th century, we see the friendship between C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and their brother “Inklings” as indispensable in the growth and flourishing of their own literary and apologetic gifts.

What is friendship? Who is a friend? The Scriptures tell us, “A friend is a friend at all times, and a brother is born for the time of adversity” (Proverbs 17:17). I am convinced that if men will seek true brotherhood, the adversities we face today will solidify bands of brothers who will be lauded in Heaven!

Therefore, men, ask yourself: what are your friends like? Do you have friends with whom you share the mission of holiness? Often young men will go to the seminary and discover the difference made by Christ-centered friendships, and their lives are transformed. This friendship is not limited to religious orders and priests. The renewal of masculinity cannot happen without banding together as brothers and true friends. In my own life, ever since my first year as a priest, I have been richly blessed by brother priests in the *Jesus Caritas Fraternity*. Their commitment to Eucharistic adoration and simplicity of life, their fidelity to Christ in celibacy and daily prayer, their fraternal love, wise counsel, and encouragement have richly influenced and inspired me to persevere in my own mission in Christ. It has been a joy to see how fraternity in our diocese has grown and flourished through your participation in our Men’s Conferences, Knights of Columbus, *That Man is You*, Cursillo Movement, and other such groups and events. There is room to grow, of course, but already the fruits of the Spirit are evident among these Catholic brothers and friends.

Conversely, we have seen what happens when men, young and old, do not form or sustain healthy friendships. Many, looking in the wrong places, find themselves in the false brotherhood of gangs, or without brotherhood at all, isolated and alone, and lacking these critical formative experiences of accountability and the trusted fellowship that only true friendship provides.

Studies have shown that many men today are living friendless lives.¹⁴ This has its effect on marriages where men have no emotional support apart from their wives, as well as on children, who should see true friends in the lives of their parents but often do not. What a blessing to have the presence of good faithful friends to provide the encouragement and accountability we need to free! Indeed, as the Scriptures tell us, “as iron sharpens iron, so one man must sharpen another” (Proverbs 27:17).

As Iron Sharpens Iron, One Man Supports Another - a Bond of Brotherhood

The importance of Catholic men establishing and maintaining a strong commitment to one another cannot be overstated. Catholic men's groups allow men to work together to deepen their relationships with Jesus, while enriching, strengthening, and supporting their faith life. In these groups men also learn how to share their faith with each other. This is a crucible in which the conviction and drive for personal evangelization is fostered. Such interactions enable men to embrace their faith and provide them the courage to step out beyond their comfort zone.

As essential and vital as men's groups are, many men have also found it important to go one step further. Having an accountability partner is an opportunity to examine the real issues of what you do, when, how often, and why. Accountable for what? Simply following an agreed to plan of action for leading a spiritual life, such as: establishing goals and objectives, and assigning priorities to each; time management of your day; daily prayer; prayer throughout the day; making contact with other men and thus the Body of Christ outside of a regular setting (i.e. Mass attendance, group meetings, etc.); spiritual reading (the bible and other books); meditative contemplation of the truths of the faith and the Gospel; increased Mass attendance; regular confession; visits to the Blessed Sacrament; training the will through the custody of the eyes; taming of the passions by fasting, and appropriate asceticism; and other agreed to issues (use of pornography, alcohol and drug abuse, anger, etc.).

To be accountable means that a man is willing to volunteer and discuss his actions and motives with someone else. For this to be as helpful as possible, there needs to be proper motivation and understanding for doing so. Men need to be clear on the purpose of an accountability partnership and recognize that it is a friendship, not a therapy encounter. And when it is achieved, by simply being open about what you do, and why you do it, the fruit of such a relationship can reveal not just how well you are doing, but what you need to work on and vet the best ways to do it. Thus, having an accountability partner can propel a man more rapidly into a deeper life in Christ.

It's important to note from the start, that each man has to be clear with the other about his expectations. How often will you make contact? What is the best time and method for contact? What are the areas for discussion? Agreeing to these particulars ahead of time and then following through, is very important. As you proceed, be consistent and stick to the plan. If you cannot follow through with your commitment, let the other person know. One point needs to be very clear. Everything said between the two men should be held in confidence. Agreement that all your conversations will be completely confidential is critical.

When choosing an accountability partner you need to ask someone you can trust. Pick someone who will be challenging, but not condemning. Someone willing to ask you probing questions, and willing to take an interest in your life. The best accountability partners take their role seriously and responsibly. After all, they want the best for you.

Lastly, while potentially feasible, two men should not be accountable to the each other. It should be a one-way relationship. If your accountability partner desires to be held accountable himself, he should establish a separate relationship with a third party.



2. Man as Husband – the Purpose of Masculine Erotic Love

Next, let us seek to understand more deeply man's calling to spousal love. Every man is made to live as a husband and a father in some way: "God assigns the dignity of every woman as a task to every man."¹⁵ Each man is called to commit and give of himself completely. For most men, this call is marriage while for others, this call is to the priesthood or to some other sincere and total self-gift in God's service. Yet, in our day, such commitment is often seen as settling for something conventional, even boring; something that limits freedom or threatens love. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Instead, I remind you of the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá: "[T]here is a need for a crusade of manliness and purity to counteract and nullify the savage work of those who think man is a beast. And that crusade is your work."¹⁶

Preparation for this sincere and complete spousal gift coincides with a man's growth into masculinity. The "single years" of a young man's life are for this formation, not a time of mere passive waiting, much less indulgence of sin. "Youth was not made for pleasure, but for heroism," says Paul Claudel, the great French Catholic playwright. I urge you, young men, to prepare for marriage even before you meet your (future) bride. Such training in sacrifice is to love your bride before you meet her, so that you may one day say, "Before I knew you, I was faithful to you."

Through spousal love, men live out a strength that endures, a strength for which the world longs, and a strength that will stabilize a crumbling society. True, this love is not free from periods of difficulties and suffering. No vocation is! However, with St. Paul, we "consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed" (Romans 8:18). There is glory in man's calling to be a husband.

When the great St. John Paul II spoke of a "spousal meaning of the body," he implied that we men are all called in some way to spousal love.¹⁷ That is, a committed love, a love that gives life, seeking the good of those to whom the man has committed. When a man is called to spousal love in marriage and family life, the priesthood, or some consecration to the Lord, he is called to a great and meaningful life. Indeed, if we run from this battle because of its challenges, we will be left empty. Those who arrive at the judgment seat of God, after this life, without the scars of a sacrificing husband, will "*hold their manhoods cheap whilst any speaks who fought with us.*"¹⁸

Let me now speak specifically to men called to conjugal love in marriage. This is a calling to the dignity and beauty of that union that is symbolic of Christ's spousal love for the Church. St Paul explains this relationship in his instruction to husbands, saying:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates

his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5: 25-32)

Marriage in Christ is not merely a human endeavor. It is higher; it is a "great mystery." The human desire for love is, in a way, a longing for infinite and eternal love. In the Sacrament of Marriage, human love is caught up in the infinite and eternal love of God.¹⁹ This is the glory, men! Called to marriage, you are called to be as Christ to your bride. Because this love unites you and your spouse sacramentally with the infinite love that Christ has for each of you, your sacramental marriage overcomes the limits of natural marriage and achieves the infinite and eternal character to which every love aspires.

Here we come to the epicenter of the masculine battle in our time, the nexus of life and love that is God's gift of sexuality. The need to develop chastity in your life, my sons, cannot be emphasized enough.

While much of our culture may not fully understand or encourage this commitment, the grandeur of spousal love to which we are called, we should in no way be discouraged. Rather, consider how blessed we are to be called to proclaim this truth in a time when it is most needed. In doing so, you radiate the light of Christ in an area of society so darkened by what has always threatened spousal love. Our Catechism names them clearly: "discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation... self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure."²⁰ We could add here the use of pornography, always toxic to both the participants and the observers, and the consumptive "hook-up" subculture that removes sexual encounters entirely from the spousal relationship.

The sexual urge owes its objective importance to its connection with the divine work of creation and this importance vanishes if our way of thinking is inspired only by the biological order of nature. — Pope St. John Paul II (writing as Karol Wojtyla), *Love and Responsibility*, p. 57

How did it come about that a culture so steadfast in supporting marriage and spousal commitment two generations ago became a culture that has reduced sexuality to mere pleasure and self-serving ends? The answer is the Sexual Revolution. For many, the Sexual Revolution promised "free love" and liberty from the shackles of old ideas about masculinity and femininity. What resulted was the separation of sexuality from the commitments of marriage and a widespread option for sterility (chemical and surgical sterilizations), amounting to a denial of what is most essentially masculine and feminine in the person. Worse, the Sexual Revolution ushered in the scourge of abortion, pornography, and sexual abuse so rampant in recent decades. Instead of real and authentic love, this false "liberty" offers cheap pleasures that

mask a deeper loneliness and pain. Instead of the security of traditional family bonds, it leaves children longing for the stability of a mother's and a father's love. Instead of the freedom that comes with accepting the truth of God's design for human love between a man and woman, the Sexual Revolution has arrogantly rebelled against human nature, a nature that will never thrive in confusion and lack of self-control. Indeed, the "love" promised by the Sexual Revolution has never been found. In its wake is wreckage, countless broken hearts bound by fear of more pain, broken lives, broken homes, broken dreams and broken belief that love is even possible. This is the rotten fruit of the Sexual Revolution.

Genesis 1:27 says, "Male and female he created them." Bishop Olmsted writes of Pope St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body and the "spousal meaning of the body." This tells us that our bodies themselves reveal God's intention for mankind. So to be male or to be female is first to be oriented to the other. These bonds towards each other are threefold: physical, emotional, and spiritual. When manifested in the marital act, each orientation creates a bond between the couple and each in its own way. Physically the bond is temporary, emotionally the bond is long lasting, and spiritually the bond is for life.

This is one reason why marriage has been elevated to a sacrament — a sacrament that builds on the covenant established between the spouses with each expression of the marital act and lasts "until death do you part." It is only humanity that has such a special ability to participate in the communion of persons that is similarly expressed by the creator of mankind, the Holy Trinity (though not in a physical manner). The communion of love between husband and wife is designed to be fruitful and life-giving, just as the Holy Trinity itself is fruitful and life-giving.

Therefore, the fruit of this union, the family, is the earthly image and icon of Trinitarian love. In a very real sense, married love creates. So marriage carries the dignity of a sacrament.

It stands to reason that if love is our deepest desire and longing, destroying love will cause us the most pain, the deepest wounds. Thus, where do we start? Where do we begin to rebuild? What do we repair first?

My sons and brothers, we must begin with ourselves.

If I may return to the analogy of the athlete, we see that no champion achieves greatness without discipline in practice or without training to pursue greatness in his sport. He must be a master of himself; he must possess self-mastery. For the man called to live conjugal love, this self-mastery finds its culmination in the virtue of chastity. We need to see masculine chastity for what it is, whereas too often, this virtue is seen in negative light, as something weak. Nothing could be more false! Chastity is strength and a rejection of slavery to the passions. Christians have always believed that chastity, whether in marriage or celibacy, is a freedom from the enslavement to sin and our passions.

To understand chastity, we must understand God: “God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love

Chastity ... is a freedom from the enslavement to sin and our passions.

and communion.”²¹ The love we live as men is a participation in and a demonstration of God’s love. As equal sharers in dignity, women, of course, also demonstrate God’s love, and yet there is a difference in how we do so. For both men and women,

“Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.”²² The virtue of chastity is the...

“...integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man’s belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman.”²³

Chastity allows us to master and properly live out this calling to be men of authentic communion. Here, let me recall Jesus’ crucial words regarding “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully”; he has “already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). This leads me to call specific attention to those acts that are (wrongly) considered “normal” and even encouraged for men in today’s culture. Here I am speaking of pornography and masturbation. The damaging effects of these hidden and narcissistic habits train the man in a direction that is the exact opposite of love. He learns nothing more than to use others. Instead of life-giving and self-emptying love, he learns to settle for self-absorbed, sterile pleasures. Recall again Jesus’ words:

Narcissism ... excessive self-love, vanity, sexual desire for one’s own body.

You have heard it said ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out, and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right

hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:27-30)

With these prophetic words, Jesus foresees modern pornography that feeds the lust of the eyes. He uses hyperbole, strong words, for men to gouge out their eye and cut off their hand in order to drive home that urgent action is needed. Pornography not only leaves a man in danger of Hell, but it also destroys the bonds with his spouse, a destruction wrought like adultery. In other words, think of pornography as just as serious and no less grave than adultery. To attempt to love another person while engaging in this practiced narcissism, without being transformed by mercy, will surely bring grave harm.

It is often said that Satan is more focused on those who follow God, because he doesn't have to worry about those who don't. So as you engage in this battle, keep your guard up. Many men have found that as they move forward in their spiritual life, sometimes things can actually get worse. Don't be surprised if temptations ramp up as you move into the breach. But rather, rejoice, because this means that you are on the right path! Jesus told St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Victory over temptation humiliates Satan, makes the glory of God shine forth, purifies our soul, fills us with humility, and makes us all the more confident in God's assistance.



When battling pornographic temptations, it is important to consider honestly the factors surrounding the temptation. For most men, these include loneliness, boredom, anger, insecurity, and stress. Simply understanding the context of a temptation prompts us to invite God to send His grace to begin to overcome the devil's tactics. The Sacrament of Confession is the place of superabundant grace and support. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). This is not a promise merely to be attained in Heaven! This promise is to begin for us now, in our everyday lives. The saints attest to this truth. Through building purity of heart, men, you will not only see God in the women in your lives but also in yourselves, also the "image of God"! Even if the darkness seems insurmountable, Christ never abandons us. As a priest, I treasure the honest encounter in confession with those who want the Lord's healing. It is a blessing to work with men in the fight to turn the tide from false to real love.

Imagine with me how different our world would be for our wives, sisters, and daughters if men lived this interior strength of chastity. In our time, we hear of such high rates of sexual assaults in our society, especially on college campuses. Is this not a time for a renewal of masculine chastity? Is this not a time for men to build up the virtue of temperance through fasting and prayer amidst brothers? Is this not a time to consider more deeply St. John Paul II's proclamation that the "dignity of every woman is a task given to every man?"

Masculine chastity is a “long and exacting work” that we should be proud to undertake!²⁴ Imagine standing before the throne of God on judgment day, where the great saints of ages past, who themselves dealt with preeminent sins in their own day, will say to each other, “We dealt with the trouble of lust in our day, but those 21st century men! These happy few battled the beast up close!” We can help each other and other men around us to strive for self-mastery, as this is best addressed among brothers. I encourage you to put aside your fears and insecurities, those that keep you from engaging head on in the fight for chastity. Christ wants to help men be formed after His own heart in each confessional of the Church and at each Mass where the power of His Blood poured out on the Cross offered in Holy Communion.

The Severing of Unholy Bonds

A spiritual bond is created whenever a man and a woman engage in conjugal union. But when committed outside of the covenant of marriage, the spiritual principle that establishes the bond still exists. However, this unholy bond can be severed and healed by the saving work of Jesus.

First, repent and go to confession. Repentance is not just feeling a sense of wrongdoing and guilt, but also making an active decision, to the best of your ability, to not commit the sin again even if you could. If you have already gone to confession for this sin, examine your conscience today to see if you have any attachments to memories or fantasies about what occurred.

Second, forgive the other person engaging with you in the activity that led to the creation of the unholy bond. Forgive them for any wrongs done against you.

Third, discard any gifts or remembrances of the relationship (e.g. cards, songs, jewelry, etc.).

Fourth, renounce and break the unholy bond in the name of Jesus! Know that to use the name of God in such a way is call to mind and action all that the He is. So to proclaim, “In the name of Jesus Christ...” is an action and prayer the Lord has given us to make the power of his passion, death and resurrection and conquering of the devil, present in our lives today. Pray:

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I now renounce any unholy bonds established between myself and ___name___ as a result of our ___specific action___, and I now break and sever any unholy bonds formed between myself and ___name___ as a result of our ___specific action___, in the name of Jesus. Amen!"

Fifth, have faith that you can now live in the freedom that Jesus offers you. If needed, remind yourself of this from time to time.



Root Causes of Pornography Use

In his book, *The Pornography Epidemic – A Catholic Approach* (Simon Peter Press, 2012), Dr. Peter Kleponis lists and describes eleven of the most common root causes of pornography use that he has found in his practice as a licensed clinical therapist. They are presented here.

1. *Selfishness*: a sense of entitlement to view pornography for one's personal pleasure.
2. *Deep family-of-origin wounds*: Many men will use pornography to ease the pain of emotional wounds from childhood. Many experienced rejection or abandonment from their parents. Others had parents who were abusive or neglectful. For these men, their use of pornography is a subconscious way of easing their pain. Some men were actually introduced to pornography by their fathers as a way to teach them about sexuality. Unfortunately, this gave them a skewed view of human sexuality and relationships.
3. *Loneliness*: craving love, companionship, friendship, and/or parental love that was never received during childhood.
4. *Male insecurity*: a lack of confidence needed for a healthy relationship.
5. *Poor body image*: the belief that his own body is so unattractive that no woman could ever love him. This is often seen in men who view homosexual pornography.
6. *Anger*: This is often toward women. Pornography is used to punish women and can be seen in men who view violent pornography.
7. *Marital conflicts*: Some men turn to pornography for comfort when they feel rejected by a wife who may be cold, critical, or overly controlling.
8. *Mistrust of women*: the experience of not feeling safe enough with women to have a healthy relationship. This is often seen in men who have been deeply hurt in past relationships.
9. *Excessive pressures*: Often work, family, or financial stress can lead a man to use pornography for comfort and escape.
10. *Weak spiritual life*: A weak faith in God often results in a lack of moral virtues and deep loneliness in the world. A person might not even be aware of his hunger for God.
11. *Accessibility*: The sheer accessibility to pornography offered by the Internet has led men into pornography who otherwise could have avoided it.

If you struggle with pornography, the biggest step you can take is to bring it out into the light. St. Paul says in his letter to the the Ephesians, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Ephesians 5:14, ESV). Brothers, the light of Christ is available to you! However, Satan wants you to remain isolated and will do everything he can to shame you into silence. Men, always keep these two things in mind: 1) there is NO shame in the truth, and 2) you are NOT alone. Step out from the shadows and receive God's forgiveness through the sacrament of confession, and seek out help to overcome what has become an epidemic among us.

What Happens to Users of Pornography?

Pornography distorts an individual's concept of sex and alters sexual attitudes and behavior, which then imply to a user certain permission-giving beliefs. It's a major threat to marriage, to family, to children, and to individual happiness. Married men who are involved in pornography feel less satisfied and less emotionally attached to their wives. The spiritual consequences are enormous, and spouses perceive pornography use as tantamount to adultery.*

Pornography and sex have real psychopharmacological effects on the brain.# When having sex or watching porn, dopamine is released into a region of the brain responsible for emotion and learning; this is what gives a sense of craving. The next time there is a desire for more sexual pleasure, dopamine is released in the brain that drives the person towards doing just that.

Sex or pornography also trigger the release of oxytocin and vasopressin. These hormones help build long-term memories for the cells. They bind a person's memories to the object that gave him or her the sexual pleasure. That's how pornographic visual images actually imprint and alter the brain, triggering an instant, involuntary, and lasting biochemical memory trail, and it is why many men say that it's hard to get those images "out of their heads."

The body also releases endorphins, natural opiates that create a euphoric wave of pleasure over the whole body. After orgasm, serotonin levels also change, bringing a sense of calm and relaxation. This effect is so powerful that it reinforces the bond between the spouses. With pornography use however, this natural effect entrenches a set of negative beliefs based on the pornographic imagery all the more.

These psychochemical effects of sex work the way God intended when you're having sex with your spouse. Together, the couple can experience a high, an alertness of sexual pleasure, and the deep calm afterwards. With each sexual embrace they are emotionally bonding to each other, strengthening and renewing their marital covenant.

But with pornography use, what is natural and meaningful according to God's design becomes distorted, addictive, and potentially abusive towards others. Users tend to become desensitized to pornography and seek more and more perverse and violent forms. As serial killer Ted Bundy, convicted for horrific crimes against women and girls, told James Dobson before his execution, "The most damaging kind of pornography - and I'm talking from hard, real, personal experience - is that that involves violence and sexual violence. The wedding of those two forces - as I know only too well - brings about behavior that is too terrible to describe."

Prolonged consumption of pornography by men produces strong notions of using others as commodities and sex objects. Sex is no longer about intimacy, procreation, or marriage; sex is about self-gratification, casual recreation, and using women, who are created in the image and likeness of God, as entertainment.

* Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D., *The Effects of Pornography on Individuals, Marriage, Family and Community*. Family Research Council, December 2009

Sam Black, *The Porn Circuit - Understand Your Brain and Break Porn Habits in 90 Days*. Covenant Eyes, Inc. 2013



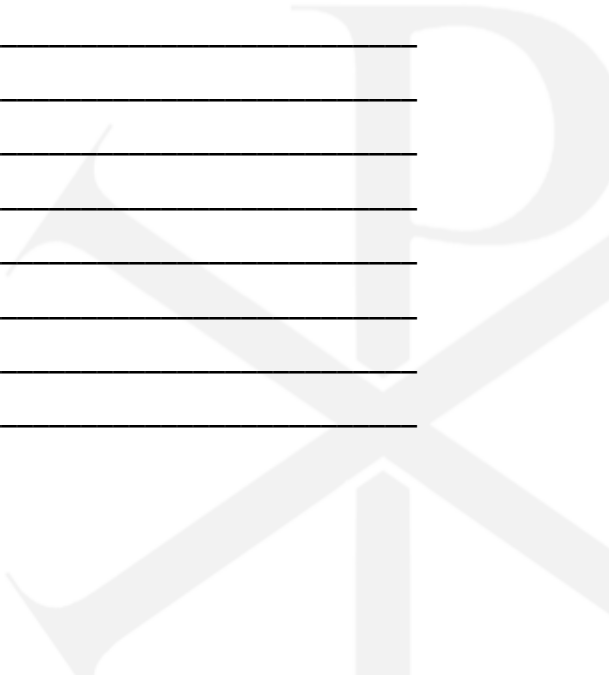
Questions for Thought

36. Bishop Olmsted describes God's gift of sexuality as "...the epicenter of the masculine battle in our time, the nexus of life and love." The Bishop courageously brings to the forefront many of the realities of the Sexual Revolution's effects on our society, and on men in particular. What areas in this section, "Man as Husband," spoke to you?

37. What role, if any, do you believe contraception has had in bringing about the general ethos of sexuality in our society today?

38. In the Book of Genesis, God says some very special things about Adam and Eve. For example, in the Garden of Eden, He says: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). Here we see that God’s creation is completed in both man and woman. God also blessed Adam and Eve, saying to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Note that God’s blessing is given not to the man alone, nor is it given to the woman alone. It is given to their union. How do these purposes of God for mankind impact your view of chastity?

The Body Reveals the Mystery of God’s Love for Human Beings. “The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God [the inner life of the Trinity as a loving communion of Persons], and thus to be a sign of it.”
Pope Saint John Paul II, February 20, 1980



3. Fatherhood is Essential

Fatherhood changes history. In the Gospel according to Matthew, where “Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers...” forty-two (42) fathers lead up to Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. In the words of St. John Paul II, fatherhood is essential to the flourishing of the world:

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.²⁵

All men are called to fatherhood in some way:

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.²⁶

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, then, attempts to abolish fatherhood.”²⁷ The great pontiff of the family points to our first parents’ original act of disobedience, which cost them and us our original innocence and freedom from bodily death, and in original sin, we find 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, in the man and relationship 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, which caused many wounds of fatherlessness, but rather because, far worse, 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 when she pours out her story...and the Lord will not delay, neither will He 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.”²⁸ 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, giving life.”²⁹ 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, for good reason, 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 of Great Importance

I wish to speak a word to you who are grandfathers. Few cultures have ever expected less and shown such indifference to those like you who have battled and who have tested wisdom to offer their children and grandchildren. The world tells you that your time of influence is at an end and that it is time to retire, that is, to resign your post of fatherhood. Don't believe it! Grandfathers matter greatly.

I have the privilege of being named after my grandfathers: Thomas Tighe Olmsted and P. James Hughes. Each in his own way fathered me alongside my own Dad. Grandpa Jim drew upon his Catholic faith to face with dignity and hope the early death of his wife, my grandmother, from cancer. Without giving into despair or self-pity, he struggled mightily to keep the family of six together and to provide for the children – the youngest of whom was my mother – during the very difficult years of the Great Depression. The memories I treasure most about Grandpa Jim were of his peaceful spirit, his Irish humor, and his sincere devotion to the Church. Grandpa Tom had an even greater impact on my life, even though he was never baptized. Beside him, I learned to care for walnut trees and watermelons, pumpkins and squash, horses and cattle, chickens and hogs. Amidst the many activities needed to make a living on our farm, I learned from Grandpa Tom and my Dad the importance of being a good neighbor, of telling the truth no matter the cost, and of having a deep respect for “Mother Nature.” When I was ordained a priest, I chose a biblical saying for my First Mass card, one that captured what I had learned from my grandfathers: “This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

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. Remember Jesus' earthly grandfather, St. Joachim, who lived a life faithful to God. In his advanced years, God the Father blessed St. Joachim and his wife, St. Anne, with the great gift of Mary, our Blessed Mother. Let every grandfather be reminded that even when the routine of daily life may appear to be insignificant, we never know what great plans God has for the last years of our lives.

Hope in the Shadows of Lost Fatherhood

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.³⁰

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.

Forgiveness and Repentance

Forgiveness is never easy. It is said that unforgiveness is like taking poison and expecting the other person to get sick. But forgiveness only takes one person and the help of Jesus. The person in need of forgiveness does not have to be involved. That would be reconciliation, which in itself is worthy to pursue. We as believers have access to the power of forgiveness that Jesus has given us. Satan seeks to rob, steal, and destroy. He is the father of lies (cf. John 8:44) and some of his lies may be bound up in unforgiveness. If you have a father or other man in your life to forgive, ask Jesus to help you forgive him. If there is any hard-heartedness on your part because of your father, or another, repent and ask Jesus to forgive you. Freedom is what God our Father offers us through His Son. ***It is yours to claim*** and to be no longer bound to the shackles of unforgiveness and resentment.



Conclusion: Sent Forth by Christ

The best friend of St. Gregory Nazianzen was St. Basil. When, as young men in their early 20s, their personal search for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith led them by separate paths to Constantinople, they soon developed a deep respect for one another. St. Gregory's description of this friendship is hopeful: "...if this is not too much for me to say, we were a rule and standard for each by which we learned the distinction between what was right and what was not."³¹ Their friendship inspired each to grow in virtue and freedom, to be less concerned for self and more eager to place his life at the service of others. I hope that each man reading this Exhortation will experience, if he has not already done so, the blessing of good friendships like the ones between the saints. I cannot imagine what my own life would be like without the good friends God has given me.

I hope, too, that you will take what is helpful in my message, bring it to the Lord in prayer, and go forward confidently in your vocation as men. Our life in Christ is not one of "do's and don'ts," but an adventure in authentic freedom. Embrace that freedom in order to place your life at the service of Christ, beginning in your home and radiating into the world.

Where is the Faith of our Fathers now?

As I write this exhortation, videos are being released documenting the barbaric practice of selling baby body parts by Planned Parenthood. Since this infamous agency receives around half a billion dollars each year from the U.S. Government, funds to carry on their slaughter of innocents, no American citizen, and certainly no man, can remain silent about this travesty of our times. We need to get off the sidelines and stand up for life on the front lines. We need faith like that of our fathers who defended the children of previous generations and who gave up their own lives rather than abandon their faith in Christ. My sons and brothers, men of the Diocese of Phoenix, we need you to step into the breach!

The Catholic martyrs of England inspired Frederick W. Faber to write the hymn "Faith of our Fathers" in AD 1849. As Faber paid tribute to the men who refused to deny Christ "in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword," he also issued a call to arms for the men of succeeding generations. Join me in praying that we, men of the 21st century, will make the words of this verse our own:

*“Our Fathers, chained in prisons dark,
Were still in heart and conscience free:
How sweet would be their children’s fate,
If they, like them, could die for Thee!
Faith of our Fathers! Holy Faith!
We will be true to thee till death.”*

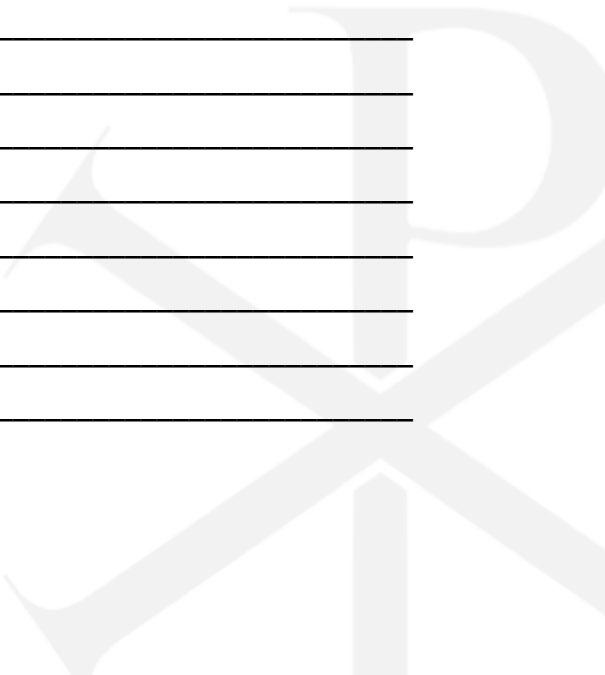
Promulgated on the Feast of the Archangels, September 29, 2015

+Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix

Questions for Thought

42. Grandfathers are special people! They have seen what younger men have not. They have experienced what younger men have yet to experience. They have wisdom and insight that is very valuable to later generations, and yet many times today they can be seen as more of a bother than a treasure. Let grandfathers be open to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to share with the young, and let the young receive the time-tested wisdom that grandfathers can offer in the spirit of his witness! What is your reaction to this?

43. At the end of his letter Bishop Olmsted asks us to take what is helpful in his message, bring it to the Lord in prayer, and go forward confidently in our vocation as men. Further, our life in Christ is not one of “dos and don’ts,” but an adventure in authentic freedom. Lastly, he encourages us to embrace our freedom in order to place your lives in the service of Christ. What does he mean by “authentic freedom?” What is it, and how would we go about embracing it?



Endnotes to the Apostolic Exhortation

- ¹ Center for Applied Research into the Apostolate. *Frequently Requested Church Statistics*, 2014
- ² Pope St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 3, 5
- ³ Interview, September 19, 2013
- ⁴ There are, of course, rare exceptions to the genetic rule. We are aware of the exceptions due to genetic defect or insufficient hormonal development. For example, Turner's Syndrome in girls and Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome or XXY Syndrome in boys cause situations which are very painful in the individual lives of these young men and women and their families. I pray that Catholic researchers, psychologists, and physicians would be at the forefront of studying these phenomena and providing ethical counsel, care, and support to these individuals and families.
- ⁵ Homily, June 14, 2015
- ⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, 32
- ⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 32.
- ⁸ General Audience, April 15, 2015
- ⁹ Opening mass, October 22, 1978
- ¹⁰ February 2015
- ¹¹ *Gaudium et spes*, 22
- ¹² *Laudato Si*, 204
- ¹³ Dr. Paul Vitz, Lecture, February 21, 2015
- ¹⁴ *Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades*.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038995>
- ¹⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, *Catechesis on Human Love*, 100:6
- ¹⁶ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*
- ¹⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, *Catechesis on Human Love*, 14:5
- ¹⁸ Shakespeare, Henry V.iv.3
- ¹⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, 48
- ²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1606
- ²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2331
- ²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2332
- ²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2337
- ²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2342
- ²⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 25
- ²⁶ Pope Francis, Address, June 15, 2015
- ²⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York: Knopf, 1994, 228

²⁸ *Familiaris Consortio*, 25

²⁹ Homily, June 26, 2013

³⁰ Adapted from *Evangelium Vitae*, 99

³¹ “On St. Basil the Great,” *Funeral Orations* (The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 22), 27

End of the Apostolic Exhortation
Into the Breach

Epilogue - Onward Step-by-Step

Men, do you want to:

- Be part of something big? A great cause?
- Take on a challenge, work towards an achievement, in a fraternity and fellowship?
- Go on journey that has meaning and purpose?
- Protect your family, wife, sons, daughters, and grandchildren?

Then ponder what it means to be an apostle – a man who is sent. Sent to do the work of Christ's soldiers in the world today.

Realize and believe that you are that apostle! Being sent by Christ Himself. You were created by God to know Him, to love Him, and to be with Him forever in eternity. And through the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ you are now God's son and can call Him Father. Our Father calls all men to Himself, and we as His sons, can rejoice in knowing that we can participate in that journey.

Begin, if you haven't already, and faithfully commit to, the Practices of a Committed Catholic Man outlined by Bishop Olmsted (pp. 40-41). Interact with other Catholic men. After Mass, at parish gatherings, and elsewhere, share the message of the Apostolic Exhortation. If you recognize a man from church at a store, go up to him and introduce yourself. Ask, "Have you heard about *Into the Breach?*"

Talk to your pastor and present him with some simple ideas that will encourage men to join together. If your parish doesn't have a men's group, speak with your pastor about starting one. The Gospel is not just to be shared with others, but lived with others. Lived with your family, your household, your parish, your diocese. Living in the Body of Christ, men need spiritual brothers.

As you proceed, beware of apathy and complacency. Good men can easily be overcome by these. You may find that many have become overwhelmed by the culture and believe there is virtually no hope—so all they can do is keep their head down and just try to get by. How solitary and lonely a life! Ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of encouragement and let the light of Christ shine forth from you towards these souls.

Many people today have become desensitized to evil. You will know this when you see it, and sadly we are seeing it all the more. The acceptance of Satan's deceptions and lies by many people is staggering (e.g. "that's just the way it is" or worse, "it's the law now"). When faced with

someone who has been desensitized in this way, lovingly and kindly engage with him. In the most peaceful and caring way, share your witness and explain the truths of the faith. All of these, apathy, complacency, and desensitization to evil, can be overcome by surrounding yourself with brothers in Christ. Brothers that provide support to one another, giving each other encouragement to persevere, holding each other accountable, all the while sharing the peace and joy of Christ.

And that peace and joy is real. It will enable you to be bold! It will enable you to be confident! Recall the words of Bishop Olmsted:

“The joy of the Gospel is stronger than the sadness wrought by sin! A throw-away culture cannot withstand the new life and light that constantly radiates from Christ. So I call upon you to open your minds and hearts to Him, the Savior who strengthens you to step into the breach!” (p. 2)

Daily, ask your heavenly Father for continued strength. Remember the prayer of St. John Neumann, “Lord, there is nothing that is going to happen to me today that you and I cannot get through together.”

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, bring me into Your service. I now willingly and wholly want to step out in faith, and Into the Breach. I deeply desire to do this, but I can be hesitant. Give me the courage, wisdom, and knowledge, to chart the course ahead and proclaim Your truth to all I encounter. Help me to understand those who object to Your truth. And right there, right then, help me to love them all the more, as You continued to love the ones who spit at You, who cursed at You, and who nailed You to the cross. Grant me the discernment to see through the lies and deceptions of Satan. Guide me into the fold of Catholic brothers. Brothers who love You and want nothing more than to serve You in fraternity. In all this, I ask for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. Michael, and Pope St. John Paul II.

Amen. ✠

Appendix A: Prayers of the Church

Three preeminent prayers of the church are offered here, followed by additional prayers for spiritual battle and protection.

The first is the holy Rosary. Satan cannot tolerate the purity of the Immaculate Blessed Virgin Mary. Often St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) called for his Rosary saying, “*Bring me my weapon!*” Say the Rosary daily and defend yourself and your family!

The second is the Litany of Loreto, or the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This prayer was approved in 1587 by Pope Sixtus V and is known by its place of origin, the Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto in Italy. It declares the many names of Our Lady and as such reminds us that we have a heavenly Mother who loves us and wants to intercede for us. My two favorite names of the Blessed Virgin are “Refuge of Sinners”, and “Ark of the Covenant”.

The third is the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy of which St. Faustina quotes Jesus in her *Diary* as saying, “*Oh, what great graces I will grant to souls who say this Chaplet ... [L]et all mankind recognize my unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it will come the day of justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fount of my mercy; let them profit from the blood and water which gushed forth for them*” (*Diary*, 848). Remember, the mercy of God is always before us until our last breath. Men, bring your cares, worries, and sufferings to Him now.

Collectively, these three prayers lay forth the proclamation of the Father’s will for mankind through the birth, baptism, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the maternal care of His mother, and His offering of divine mercy. Jesus is saying to us that He wants nothing more than to gather us to Himself through His Mother and bring us back to His Heavenly Father.

Firstly, all men are encouraged to begin their day with a Morning Offering, such as:

My Morning Offering

O my God, in union with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus from all the altars throughout the world, joining with it the offering of my every thought, word and action of this day.

O my Jesus, I desire today to gain every indulgence and merit I can, and I offer them together with myself, to Mary Immaculate – that she may best apply them to the interests of your most Sacred Heart. *Precious blood of Jesus, save us! Immaculate Heart of Mary, Pray for us! Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us!*

The Holy Rosary

How to Pray the Rosary

1. Make the Sign of the Cross.
2. Holding the Crucifix, say the Apostles Creed.
3. On the first bead, say an Our Father.
4. Say a Hail Mary on each of the next three beads.
5. Say the Glory Be.
6. To start each of the five decades, announce the Mystery, then say the Our Father.
7. While fingering the ten beads of each decade, say a Hail Mary for each. At the end say a Glory Be.
8. After finishing each decade, some people say the following prayer requested by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima: O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of Hell; lead all souls to Heaven, especially those who are in most need of your mercy.
9. After saying the five decades, say the Hail, Holy Queen, followed by this dialogue and prayer:
V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.
V. Let us pray:
R. O God, whose Only Begotten Son, by his life, Death, and Resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant, we beseech thee, that while meditating on these mysteries of the most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Mysteries of the Holy Rosary

As you pray each decade, meditate on its associated mystery. Place yourself in the midst of the scene. Imagine being there, seeing and hearing what is happening around you. As you do this, ask the Holy Spirit to inform, instruct, and illumine your mind. There are four sets of mysteries, traditionally prayed on certain days of the week. Each are provided here along with their virtue or fruits, and corresponding scriptural references.

The Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary (Monday and Saturday)

1. The Annunciation of the Lord to Mary (Humility) Luke 1: 26-38; John 1:14
2. The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Charity/Love of Neighbor) Luke 1: 39-56
3. The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ (Poverty) Luke 2: 6-20; Matthew 1:18-25
4. The Presentation of our Lord (Obedience) Luke 2: 22-39
5. Finding Jesus in the Temple at age 12 (Joy in finding Jesus; prudence) Luke 2: 41-51

The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary (Tuesday and Friday)

1. The Agony of Jesus in the Garden (True sorrow for sin; repentance) Matthew 26: 36-46;
Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22: 39-46
2. The Scourging at the Pillar (Modesty and purity; mortification or self-denial)
Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1
3. Jesus is Crowned with Thorns (Moral courage; love of our enemies) Matthew 27:29-30;
Mark 15:16-20; John 1: 2-3
4. Jesus Carries the Cross (Patience, especially when suffering; fortitude)
Luke 23: 26-32; Matthew 27:31-32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23: 26-32
5. The Crucifixion of our Lord (Perseverance; mercy) Luke 23: 33-46; Matthew 27: 33-54;
Mark 15: 22-39; Luke 23: 33-47; John 19: 17-37

The Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary (Wednesday and Sunday)

1. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Faith) Matthew 28: 1-10; Mark 16: 1-18; Luke 24: 1-49;
John 20:1-29
2. The Ascension of Jesus to Heaven (Hope) Mark: 16: 19-20; Luke 24: 50-51; Acts 1: 6-11
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit (Love of God; gifts of the Holy Spirit) Acts 2: 1-41
4. The Assumption of Mary into Heaven (Grace of a happy death; eternal happiness)
Revelation 12:1
5. Mary is Crowned as Queen of Heaven and Earth (True devotion to Mary) Revelation 12:1

The Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary (Thursday)

1. The Baptism in the Jordan (Fidelity to our baptismal promises) Matthew 3:11-17;
Luke 3:15-22; John 1:22-34
2. The Wedding at Cana (Faith in Mary's intercession and maternal care) John 2: 1-12
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom (Conversion of heart) Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 5:1-8;
Matthew 6:33; Matthew 7:21
4. The Transfiguration (Become a new person in Christ) Luke 9:28-36; Matthew 17:1-8
5. The Institution of the Eucharist (Love of the Eucharist; active participation at Mass);
Matthew 26:26-28; John 6: 33-59

Litany of Loreto

V. Lord, have mercy on us.

R. Christ, have mercy on us.

V. Lord, have mercy on us. Christ hear us.

R. Christ, graciously hear us.

God, the Father of heaven, *have mercy on us.*

God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, *have mercy on us.*

God, the Holy Spirit, *have mercy on us.*

Holy Trinity, One God, *have mercy on us.*

Holy Mary, *pray for us.*

Holy Mother of God, *pray for us.*

Holy Virgin of virgins, *pray for us.*

Mother of Christ, *pray for us.*

Mother of divine grace, *pray for us.*

Mother most pure, *pray for us.*

Mother most chaste, *pray for us.*

Mother inviolate, *pray for us.*

Mother undefiled, *pray for us.*

Mother most amiable, *pray for us.*

Mother most admirable, *pray for us.*

Mother of good counsel, *pray for us.*

Mother of our Creator, *pray for us.*

Mother of our Savior, *pray for us.*

Virgin most prudent, *pray for us.*

Virgin most venerable, *pray for us.*

Virgin most renowned, *pray for us.*

Virgin most powerful, *pray for us.*

Virgin most merciful, *pray for us.*

Virgin most faithful, *pray for us.*

Mirror of justice, *pray for us.*

Seat of wisdom, *pray for us.*

Cause of our joy, *pray for us.*

Spiritual vessel, *pray for us.*

Vessel of honor, *pray for us.*

Singular vessel of devotion, *pray for us.*

Mystical rose, *pray for us.*
Tower of David, *pray for us.*
Tower of ivory, *pray for us.*
House of gold, *pray for us.*
Ark of the covenant, *pray for us.*
Gate of Heaven, *pray for us.*
Morning star, *pray for us.*
Health of the sick, *pray for us.*
Refuge of sinners, *pray for us.*
Comforter of the afflicted, *pray for us.*
Help of Christians, *pray for us.*
Queen of angels, *pray for us.*
Queen of patriarchs, *pray for us.*
Queen of prophets, *pray for us.*
Queen of apostles, *pray for us.*
Queen of martyrs, *pray for us.*
Queen of confessors, *pray for us.*
Queen of virgins, *pray for us.*
Queen of all saints, *pray for us.*
Queen conceived without original sin, *pray for us.*
Queen assumed into heaven, *pray for us.*
Queen of the most holy Rosary, *pray for us.*
Queen of peace, *pray for us.*

V. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
R. Spare us, O Lord.

V. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
R. Graciously hear us, O Lord.

V. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
R. Have mercy on us.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray:

R. Grant, O Lord God, we beseech Thee, that we Thy servants may rejoice in continual health of mind and body; and, through the glorious intercession of Blessed Mary ever Virgin, may be freed from present sorrow, and enjoy eternal gladness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy

Opening Prayers:

You expired, Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world.

O Fount of Life, unfathomable Divine Mercy, envelop the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us.

O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fountain of Mercy for us, I trust in You! *(Repeat three times)*

The Chaplet:

On the first three initial beads of the Rosary say an:

Our Father, Hail Mary and the Apostles Creed.

At the beginning of each of the five decades say:

Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, *in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.*

On each of the ten Hail Mary beads, pray:

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, *have mercy on us and on the whole world.*

After the five decades, say the concluding prayer:

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, *have mercy on us and on the whole world.*
(Repeat three times)

Closing Prayer:

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself.

Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, *pray for us.*

Additional Prayers for Spiritual Battle and Protection

Prayers to the Holy Spirit

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Move in me, Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy. Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy. Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.

- Saint Augustine

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
And kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.
And you will renew the face of the earth.

- Traditional

Prayers for Purity

Jesus, Lover of chastity, Mary, Mother most pure, and Joseph, chaste guardian of the Virgin, to you I come at this hour, begging you to plead with God for me. I earnestly wish to be pure in thought, word, and deed in imitation of your own holy purity.

Obtain for me, then, a deep sense of modesty which will be reflected in my external conduct. Protect my eyes, the windows of my soul, from anything that might dim the luster of a heart that must mirror only Christ-like purity.

And when the “Bread of Angels becomes the Bread of me” in my heart at Holy Communion, seal it forever against the suggestions of sinful pleasures.

Heart of Jesus, Fount of all purity, have mercy on us.

- Traditional

Dearest Jesus! I know well that every perfect gift, and above all others that of chastity, depends upon the most powerful assistance of Your Providence, and that without You a creature can do nothing. Therefore, I pray You to defend, with Your grace, chastity and purity in my soul as well as in my body. And if I have ever received through my senses any impression that could stain my chastity and purity, may You, Who are the Supreme Lord of all my powers, take it from me, that I may with an immaculate heart advance in Your love and service, offering myself chaste all the days of my life on the most pure altar of Your Divinity. Amen.

- St. Thomas Aquinas

The Motto of St. Anthony

Inscribed in the base of the obelisk in the center of St. Peter's Square in Rome by the Franciscan Pope Sixtus V, it is said that St. Anthony taught this prayer to a poor woman who sought help against the temptations of the devil.

Ecce Crucem Domini!
Fugite partes adversae!
Vicit Leo de tribu Juda,
Radix David! Alleluia!

Behold, the Cross of the Lord!
Begone, all evil powers!
The Lion of the tribe of Judah,
The Root of David, has conquered!
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Prayer for Protection

No disaster can overtake you, no plague come near your tent; he will put you in his angel's charge to guard you wherever you go. They will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone (Psalm 91:10-12). Father, may the precious Blood of Jesus be upon us, upon all our loved ones, upon our homes, upon all those who will be participating in this [*gathering, meeting, retreat, conference, ...*]. Protect us from all attacks of the evil one. Send your holy angels to safeguard our mission that it may produce abundant blessings on behalf of your kingdom. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Michael

Short Form

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Long Form

O Glorious Prince of the heavenly host, St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in the battle and in the terrible warfare that we are waging against the principalities and powers, against the rulers of this world of darkness, against the evil spirits. Come to the aid of man, whom Almighty God created immortal, made in His own image and likeness, and redeemed at a great price from the tyranny of Satan.

Fight this day the battle of the Lord, together with the holy angels, as already thou hast fought the leader of the proud angels, Lucifer, and his apostate host, who were powerless to resist thee, nor was there place for them any longer in Heaven. That cruel, ancient serpent, who is called the devil

or Satan who seduces the whole world, was cast into the abyss with his angels. Behold, this primeval enemy and slayer of men has taken courage. Transformed into an angel of light, he wanders about with all the multitude of wicked spirits, invading the earth in order to blot out the name of God and of His Christ, to seize upon, slay and cast into eternal perdition souls destined for the crown of eternal glory. This wicked dragon pours out, as a most impure flood, the venom of his malice on men of depraved mind and corrupt heart, the spirit of lying, of impiety, of blasphemy, and the pestilent breath of impurity, and of every vice and iniquity.

These most crafty enemies have filled and inebriated with gall and bitterness the Church, the spouse of the immaculate Lamb, and have laid impious hands on her most sacred possessions. In the Holy Place itself, where the See of Holy Peter and the Chair of Truth has been set up as the light of the world, they have raised the throne of their abominable impiety, with the iniquitous design that when the Pastor has been struck, the sheep may be dispersed.

Arise then, O invincible Prince, bring help against the attacks of the lost spirits to the people of God, and give them the victory. They venerate thee as their protector and patron; in thee holy Church glories as her defense against the malicious power of hell; to thee has God entrusted the souls of men to be established in heavenly beatitude. Oh, pray to the God of peace that He may put Satan under our feet, so far conquered that he may no longer be able to hold men in captivity and harm the Church. Offer our prayers in the sight of the Most High, so that they may quickly find mercy in the sight of the Lord; and vanquishing the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, do thou again make him captive in the abyss, that he may no longer seduce the nations. Amen.

V. Behold the Cross of the Lord; be scattered ye hostile powers.

R. The Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered, the root of David.

V. Let Thy mercies be upon us, O Lord.

R. As we have hoped in Thee.

V. O Lord, hear my prayer.

R. And let my cry come unto Thee.

Let us pray.

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we call upon Thy holy Name, and as supplicants, we implore Thy clemency, that by the intercession of Mary, ever Virgin Immaculate and our Mother, and of the glorious St. Michael the Archangel, Thou wouldst deign to help us against Satan and all the other unclean spirits who wander about the world for the injury of the human race and the ruin of souls. Amen.

- *Roman Raccolta*. July 23, 1898, supplement approved July 31, 1902, London: Burnes, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1935, 12th edition.

Appendix B: the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Examination of Conscience

Prayer Before Confession

Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind that I may clearly know my sins. Move my heart that I may be sincerely sorry for them, honestly confess them and firmly resolve to amend my life. Spirit of Wisdom, grant me to see the malice of sin in my ingratitude toward You, the all-loving God. Spirit of Fortitude, help me to make whatever sacrifice is needed to avoid sin in the future. Amen.

How to go to Confession

The priest welcomes the penitent warmly, greeting him with kindness.

Then the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross, and prays:

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned, it has been (*the amount of time*) since my last confession.”

The penitent then confesses his sins. The priest may counsel the penitent on how to better live a Christian life and then will propose an act of penance. The penance might be prayer, a work of mercy, or an act of charity, or similar.

The priest asks the penitent to express sorrow by praying an Act of Contrition, such as:

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you
and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell;
but most of all because they offend you, my God,
who are all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve with the help of your grace,
to confess my sins, to do penance, to amend my life, and avoid the near occasions of sin.
Amen.”

The priest then prays the Prayer of Absolution by extending his hands over the penitent’s head and pronounces the words of absolution. The penitent responds, “Amen.”

The priest will usually praise the mercy of God and will invite the penitent to do the same, concluding the sacrament by saying, “Go in peace.”

Venial versus Mortal Sin

Sin is an act we commit that harms us or someone else. It hurts our relationship with God so much so that mortal sin is the complete severing of our relationship with God. Venial sin does not completely break our relationship with God, but it’s still sin.

In order for a sin to be considered mortal, three conditions must all be met:

- The sin must involve serious matter.
- We must have full knowledge that we are committing this sin and that it is a serious matter.
- We must give full and unencumbered consent to committing the action.

This is what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says about venial sins:

One commits venial sin when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent. (CCC 1862)

Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness." (1863)

On the other hand, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says this about mortal sins:

Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. (CCC 1855)

Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother." The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger. (CCC 1858)

Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin. (CCC 1859)

An Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten Commandments*

The First Commandment

I Am the Lord Your God, You Shall Have No Other Gods Besides Me

- Do I fail to love God, to make God first in my life, to thank Him, trust Him, love Him as He deserves?
- Do I make a god out of my work, my possession, or my image in the eyes of others so that these rule my life instead of God?
- Have I tried to grow in the knowledge of God through daily prayer and scripture reading?
- Have I taken time to teach my family about the ways of God and to pray with them?
- Have I disobeyed the commandments of God or the Church?
- Have I refused to accept what God has revealed as true, or what the Catholic Church proposes for belief?
- Have I nourished and protected my faith?
- Have I refused to defend God and my faith to others when they raise objections?
- Have I refused to believe in God (Atheism)?
- Have I engaged in agnosticism?
- Have I deliberately misled others about doctrine or the faith?
- Have I rejected the Catholic faith, joined another Christian denomination, or joined or practiced another religion?
- Have I joined a group forbidden to Catholics?
- Have I despaired about my salvation or the forgiveness of my sins?
- Have I presumed on God's mercy? (Committing a sin in expectation of forgiveness, or asking for forgiveness without conversion and practicing virtue.)
- Have I let someone or something influence my choices more than God?
- Have I practiced idolatry?
- Have I practiced the spiritual aspects of Yoga?
- Have I practiced the occult (Wiccans, Satanism, invoking demons, Ouija Boards, black magic, selling your soul, Séances, channeling spirits, shamanism, consulting mediums, Reiki, divination, using charms, horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, clairvoyance, lot interpretation, or card reading)?
- Have I practiced superstition?
- Have I attributed supernatural power to a source other than God?
- Have I hidden a serious sin or told a lie in confession?
- Have I engaged in simony by buying or selling spiritual things?

The Second Commandment

You Shall Not Take the Name of the Lord Your God in Vain

- Have I used the name of God in cursing or blasphemy?
- Have I failed to keep vows or promises that I have made to God?
- Have I spoken about the Faith, the Church, the saints, or sacred things with irreverence, hatred or defiance?
- Have I watched television or movies, or listened to music that treated God, the Church, the saints, or sacred things irreverently?
- Have I used vulgar, suggestive or obscene speech?
- Have I belittled others in my speech?
- Have I behaved disrespectfully in Church?
- Have I misused places or things set apart for the worship of God?
- Have I committed perjury? (Breaking an oath or lying under oath.)
- Have I sworn or made promises in God's name to things that were untrue or of little importance even if they were true?
- Have I blamed God for my failings?

The Third Commandment

Remember to Keep Holy the Sabbath Day

- Have I set time aside each day for personal prayer to God?
- Have I missed Mass on Sunday or Holy Days (through own fault without sufficient reason)?
- Have I refused to help others attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days?
- Have I committed a sacrilege against the Blessed Sacrament?
- Have I received a sacrament while in the state of mortal sin?
- Have I habitually come late to and/or leave early from Mass without a good reason?
- Have I performed servile work on Sundays or other Holy Days without serious cause?
- Do I shop, labor, or do business unnecessarily on Sunday or other Holy Days of Obligation?
- Do I not attend to taking my children to Mass?
- Do I knowingly eat meat on a forbidden day (or not fasting on a fast day)?
- Do I eat or drink within one hour of receiving Communion (other than medical need)?
- Have I required workers under my direction to perform servile work on a Sunday or Holy Day without serious cause?
- Have I devoted time to my family and loved ones on Sundays and Holy Days?

The Fourth Commandment

Honor Your Father and Your Mother

- Have I neglected the needs of my parents in their old age or in their time of need?
- Have I neglected to give my children proper food, clothing, shelter, education, discipline and care?
- Have I provided for the religious education and formation of my children for as long as they are under my care?
- Have I ensured that my children still under my care regularly frequent the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion?
- Have I educated my children in a way that corresponds to my religious convictions?
- Have I provided my children with a positive, prudent and personalized education in the Catholic teaching on human sexuality?
- Have I been to my children a good example of how to live the Catholic Faith?
- Have I prayed with and for my children?
- Have I lived in humble obedience to those who legitimately exercise authority over me?
- Have I broken the law?
- Have I supported or voted for a politician whose positions are opposed to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church?
- Have I failed to love and sacrifice for my family?
- Have I promoted policies or laws that undermine the family such as circumventing parental consent or promoted unnatural family structures, and undermine the common good and the moral law?

The Fifth Commandment

You Shall Not Kill

- Have I unjustly and intentionally killed a human being?
- Have I been involved in an abortion, directly or indirectly (through advice, etc.)?
- Have I seriously considered or attempted suicide?
- Have I supported, promoted or encouraged the practice of assisted suicide or mercy killing?
- Have I deliberately desired to kill an innocent human being?
- Have I unjustly inflicted bodily harm on another person?
- Have I unjustly threatened another person with bodily harm?
- Have I verbally or emotionally abused another person?
- Have I hated another person, or wished him evil?
- Have I been prejudiced, or unjustly discriminated against others because of their race, color, nationality, sex or religion?

- Have I purposely provoked another by teasing or nagging?
- Have I recklessly endangered my life or health, or that of another, by my actions?
- Have I driven recklessly or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?
- Have I failed to protect others to the best of my ability and duty?
- Have I physically, emotionally, or psychologically injured someone or desired to do so?
- Have I given scandal or otherwise shown lack of care for someone's soul?
- Have I abused alcohol or other drugs?
- Have I sold or given drugs to others to use for non-therapeutic purposes?
- Have I used tobacco immoderately?
- Have I over-eaten?
- Have I shown a lack of concern for my health or that of others?
- Have I encouraged others to sin by giving scandal?
- Have I helped another to commit a mortal sin (through advice, driving them somewhere, etc.)?
- Have I caused serious injury or death by criminal neglect?
- Have I indulged in serious anger?
- Have I refused to control my temper?
- Have I been mean to, quarreled with, or willfully hurt someone?
- Have I been unforgiving to others, when mercy or pardon was requested?
- Have I sought revenge or hoped something bad would happen to someone?
- Have I delighted to see someone else get hurt or suffer?
- Have I treated animals cruelly, causing them to suffer or die needlessly?
- Have I given scandal through my actions or inaction?

The Sixth Commandment
You Shall Not Commit Adultery

- Have I failed to practice and promote chastity?
- Have I used artificial birth control or encouraged its use?
- Have I refused children and the gift of life without just cause?
- Have I participated in in vitro fertilization or immoral fertility treatments (treatments that do not promote procreation through the marital act) or encouraged someone else to do so?
- Have I procured a sterilization of my reproductive organs or encouraged someone else to do so?
- Have I forced sex on someone (including a spouse)?
- Have I denied sex to my spouse without just cause?
- Have I masturbated?
- Have I deliberately caused male climax outside of sexual intercourse?

- Have I provided or promoted sexual education that does not follow the teachings of the Catholic Church?
- Have I used or promoted pornography whether in photos, videos, audio, written word?
- Have I donated sperm or eggs?
- Have I indulged in impure (involving nudity or sex) movies, television, or music, conversation, or jokes?
- Have I committed adultery (sexual acts or conversation with a married person or with a person that is not my spouse)?
- Have I divorced my spouse or contemplated doing so even though I am in a valid marriage without grave cause?
- Have I entered into a marriage without the blessing of the Church?
- Have I committed incest?
- Have I engaged in polygamy or polyandry?
- Have I been involved in an “open marriage”?
- Have I committed rape?
- Have I engaged in petting, sexting, or other foreplay outside of marriage?
- Have I harmed children sexually?
- Have I engaged in unnatural sexual activities (bestiality, sex with objects, etc.)?
- Have I engaged in or promoted prostitution?
- Have I seduced someone or allowed myself to be seduced?
- Have I refused to accept my God-given sexual identity (sex change operations, cross-dressing, etc.)?
- Have I promoted, advanced, or cooperated in sins against the sixth commandment?
- Have I committed fornication? (Sexual relations with someone of the opposite sex when neither of us is married.)
- Have I engaged in homosexual activity? (Sexual activity with someone of the same sex.)
- Have I made uninvited and unwelcome sexual advances toward another?
- Have I purposely dressed immodestly?

The Seventh Commandment
You Shall Not Steal

- Have I stolen something?
- Have I gambled excessively?
- Have I committed fraud (making a false claim to an insurance company, falsifying information for financial gain)?
- Have I refused to be generous with my resources to those in need?
- Have I failed to practice the corporal works of mercy?
- Have I vandalized or defaced someone else’s property?

- Have I cheated?
- Have I paid a fair wage to my workers for an honest day's work?
- Have I prevented someone from holding a job (unjustly discriminating, or sabotaging someone's chances at employment)?
- Have I promoted actions that lead to slavery of others (sweatshops, human trafficking, or slavery proper)?
- Have I broken a contract by not fulfilling my end of the obligation?
- Have I participated in or promoted an unjust strike or lockout?
- Have I fired someone unjustly?
- Have I accumulated excessive debt and/or failed to repay it?
- Have I engaged in usury (charging excessive interest)?
- Have I overcharged someone or taken advantage of someone in a trade?
- Have I filed or promoted an unjust lawsuit against someone?
- Have I failed to make restitution for theft, fraud, or any other action against the 7th commandment?
- Have I shown a disregard for the environment?
- Have I failed to respect private property or violated the Church's teachings on subsidiarity by advocating for excessive socialism, or too much government control of resources?
- Have I failed to work diligently and deliver an honest day's work to my employer?
- Have I despised work or succumbed to sloth?
- Have I failed to do the appropriate amount of work for my family?
- Have I attempted to speculate and drive up the price of goods or services?

The Eighth Commandment

You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor

- Have I lied?
- Have I knowingly and willfully deceived another?
- Have I perjured myself under oath?
- Have I gossiped?
- Have I committed detraction? (Destroying a person's reputation by telling others about his faults for no good reason.)
- Have I committed slander or calumny? (Telling lies about another person in order to destroy his reputation.)
- Have I committed libel? (Writing lies about another person in order to destroy his reputation.)
- Have I been guilty of rash judgment? (Assuming the worst of another person based on circumstantial evidence.)
- Have I failed to make reparation for a lie I told, or for harm done to a person's reputation?

- Have I failed to speak out in defense of the Catholic Faith, the Church, or of another person?
- Have I betrayed another's confidence through speech?

The Ninth Commandment

You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife

- Have I given in to concupiscence (intense human carnal desires)?
- Have I given in to lust (disordered desire of inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure)?
- Have I made sexually suggestive or harassing comments or advances toward someone?
- Have I failed to dress modestly or averted my eyes when someone else is dressed immodestly?
- Have I violated someone's privacy by spying on them?
- Have I encouraged or voluntarily indulged in impure thoughts?
- Have I promoted promiscuity or immoral attitudes toward sex, modesty, or purity, or moral permissiveness?

The Tenth Commandment

You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Goods

- Have I envied others because of their possessions?
- Have I been greedy?
- Have I been covetous of others' possessions?
- Have I failed to live simply and instead given in to materialism?
- Have I failed to rejoice in another's success?

* www.stmaryswaco.org, and www.solemncharge.com

The Precepts of the Church[#]

The First Precept of the Church

You Shall Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

(See examination under the Third Commandment)

The Second Precept of the Church

You Shall Confess Your Sins at Least Once a Year

- Have I made a good Confession of my mortal sins least once a year?
- Have I purposely omitted telling my mortal sins in my last Confession?
- Have I performed the penance I was given?
- Have I made reparation for any harm I have done to others?

The Third Precept of the Church

You Shall Humbly Receive Your Creator in Holy Communion at Least During the Easter Season

- Have I fulfilled my Easter duty to receive Holy Communion at least once between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday?
- Have I received Holy Communion while in the state of mortal sin?
- Have I fasted an hour before receiving Holy Communion?

The Fourth Precept of the Church

You Shall Keep Holy the Holy days of Obligation

(See examination under the Third Commandment)

The Fifth Precept of the Church

You Shall Observe the Prescribed Days of Fasting and Abstinence

- Have I done penance every Friday, if not abstaining from meat, then some other form of penance?
- Have I abstained from meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent (if I am 14 years of age or older)?
- Have I fasted on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (if I am between the ages of 18 and 59)?
- Do I spend time in prayer, doing spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and practicing self-denial?

The Sixth Precept of the Church

You Shall Contribute to the Support of the Church

- Have I contributed a just amount of my time, talents and money to support my parish and the work of the Church?

The Seventh Precept of the Church

You Shall Observe the Laws of the Church Concerning Marriage

- Have I been living in a valid and licit marriage according to the laws of the Catholic Church?
- Have I abandoned my spouse and family by separation or divorce?
- Have I kept company with someone whom I cannot marry in the Catholic Church?
- Have I given scandal by living with a member of the opposite sex without the benefit of a marriage blessed by the Catholic Church?
- Have I entered into marriage with more than one person at the same time?

APPENDIX C: SCRIPTURE VERSES FOR FAITH IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today; The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still." (Exodus 14:13b-14)

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. It is the Lord who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed. (Deuteronomy 31:6-8)

You will forget your misery;
you will remember it as waters that have passed away. (Job 11:16)

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
And those who know thy name put their trust in thee,
for thou, O Lord, hast not forsaken those who seek thee. (Psalm 9:9-10)

I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. (Psalm 16:8)

On the day I called, thou didst answer me,
my strength of soul thou didst increase. (Psalm 138:3)

If you sit down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. (Proverbs 3:24)

I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. (Psalm 34:4, 10b)

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Though a host encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident. (Psalm 27:1, 3)

Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early and go late
to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep. (Psalm 127:1-2)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

The Lord is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.
He fulfills the desire of all who fear him,
he also hears their cry, and saves them. (Psalm 145:18-19)

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!
(Psalm 139:7, 9-10, 23-24)

Rejoice not over me, O my enemy;
when I fall, I shall rise;
when I sit in darkness,
the Lord will be a light to me. (Micah 7:8)

For your Father knows what you need before
you ask him. Therefore, do not be anxious,
saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we
drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the
Gentiles seek all these things; and your
heavenly Father knows that you need them
all. But seek first his kingdom and his
righteousness, and all these things shall be
yours as well. Therefore, do not be anxious
about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be
anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble
be sufficient for the day.
(Matthew 6:8b 31-34)

And which of you by being anxious can add
a cubit to his span of life? If then you are not
able to do as small a thing as that, why are
you anxious about the rest? (Luke 12:25-26)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy
laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke
upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle
and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for
your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my
burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch
cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in
the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in
me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He
who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that
bears much fruit, for apart from me you can
do nothing. If you abide in me, and my
words abide in you, ask whatever you will,
and it shall be done for you. If you keep my
commandments, you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's
commandments and abide in his love.
(John 15:4-5, 7, 10)

I consider that the sufferings of this present
time are not worth comparing with the glory
that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

We know that in everything God works for
good with those who love him, who are
called according to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28)

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no
longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me;
and the life I now live in the flesh I live by
faith in the Son of God, who loved me and
gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

If God is for us, who is against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved 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 8:31b, 35, 37-39)

Then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Romans 16:20)

And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. (Galatians 6:9)

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:6-8)

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
(Colossians 3:2-4)

But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.
(2 Thessalonians 3:3)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (James 1:5-6)

Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.
(1 Peter 5:7-10)

“...with the mercy shown us, we do not loose heart. On the contrary, we renounce those practices which shame conceals.”
(2 Corinthians 4:1-2 Challoner-Rheims)

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my
fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

For he will deliver you from the snare of the
fowler and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions, and under
his wings you will find refuge; his
faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night, or
the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or
the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand, but it will
not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes and see the
punishment of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your
refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,
no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near
your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning
you to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against
a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder, the
young lion and the serpent you will
trample under foot.

Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
With long life I will satisfy them, and show
them my salvation. (Psalm 91)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test
the spirits to see whether they are from God;
for many false prophets have gone out into
the world. By this you know the Spirit of
God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus
Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and
every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not
from God. And this is the spirit of the
antichrist, of which you have heard that it is
coming; and now it is already in the world.
Little children, you are from God, and have
conquered them; for the one who is in you is
greater than the one who is in the world.
They are from the world; therefore, what
they say is from the world, and the world
listens to them. We are from God. Whoever
knows God listens to us, and whoever is not
from God does not listen to us. From this we
know the spirit of truth and the spirit of
error. (1 John 4:1-6)

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is
made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all
the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that
the power of Christ may dwell in me.
Therefore, I am content with weaknesses,
insults, hardships, persecutions, and
calamities for the sake of Christ; for
whenever I am weak, then I am strong.
(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

No temptation has overtaken you that is not
common to man. God is faithful, and he will
not let you be tempted beyond your ability,
but with the temptation he will also provide
the way of escape, that you may be able to
endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV)

No weapon that is fashioned against you
shall succeed, and you shall refute every
tongue that rises against you in judgment.
(Isaiah 54:17a ESV)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anthony J. Castellano, a popular speaker to Catholic audiences, has been leading and participating in Catholic men's groups and conferences in the Archdiocese of Washington since 2005. Under the guidance of three pastors, he has established and led a seven-year biweekly men's group, an ongoing four-year monthly sexual purity group for men, and most recently, a 175-member weekly men's group. An Information Technology professional in the public sector for 28 years, Tony is also an Adjunct Professor of Computer Science at a major college in the Washington, DC area. A Knight of Columbus, father of seven, and grandfather of two, Tony lives with his wife Ellen.

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“AND I SOUGHT FOR A MAN
AMONG THEM WHO SHOULD
BUILD UP THE WALL AND
STAND IN THE BREACH BEFORE
ME FOR THE LAND...”

- EZEKIEL 22:30

