

I ST JOSEPH AS A MODEL FOR THE LEADER

1. The need of a Father model

a) What the Pope says

“Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person.”

Dear sisters and brothers,
dear pastors, parish priests called to build missionary parishes, communities of missionary-disciples;
dear Promoters, Referents of Nations, called to promote a New Pentecost, a New Evangelisation and a new way of being a catholic parish;
dear area leaders, division leaders, leaders of cells, who are sharing in the pastoral mission of your parish priests in accompanying people attracted by your hospitality;
dear members of cells and really all baptised Christians, who have put on Christ the Evangeliser and Prophet, the High Priest and the Good Shepherd;
dear sisters and brothers, who are seeking to be like Jesus, in Whose Face one can see the Face of the Father....

I wish to share with you my great desire to become a father, to become your spiritual father.

Let me tell you what I mean. At the funeral of our beloved Don PiGi, I prayed that God may give me a share, a double portion of the spirit of Don PiGi. For me and for many, Don PiGi was a real spiritual father. I do not know whether there is need of specifying his fatherhood by the adjective spiritual. I know people who consider Don PiGi as their father, not just spiritual father, but a real father who cared for their personal and human growth. What I mean by the word “sharing” is more than what we mean during our cell meeting at the time of sharing. I do not want just to tell you about my desire of becoming a father. No, I want that my desire becomes your desire.

Sharing a desire is not like sharing say an orange. When you share an orange you are left with half an orange, or with one half, or one fourth, or one twelfth. But when you share a desire and you see someone else desiring what you desire, your desire increases, multiplies!

I am blessed to have had a father who was a real father to me and to my brothers and sister. I have been blessed by a father who carried the name after St Joseph, whom he loved so much and who, I am sure, inspired him so much. I am so fortified by a father who died on the 19th of the month, that echoes the 19th of March,

when we are starting this journey at the School of St Joseph, and to be sure on Wednesday!

b) Fatherless generations

If I am a father it is not because of my priestly ordination, but because of my father!

Priestly ordination, like marriage, does not make you a father. At the seminary they used to tell us: *“If you have a problem before ordination, it will not go away but rather aggravates.”* Maybe one can say the same about marriage: if one does not have a father’s heart, marriage and bearing children will not transform your heart, but they will expose you for what you are.

At the inauguration of the Year of St Joseph, Pope Francis made a modest or polite statement that cannot pass unnoticed. He said: *“Children today often seem orphans, lacking fathers.”* I came across some statistics. I do not think that it has any relevance to say which country come from, because it is very easy to conclude that in your country you are there, and if not you are very close.

There are of course some genuine orphans. But the orphans of whom the Pope spoke are those comprising the growing number of kids whose fathers, although alive and well, simply aren’t doing the job.

Numbers given by statistics suggest the dimensions of the problem. In one country, in 2019, there were roughly 16 million children—about one out of every four—without a father in the home. And while that can happen for a number of reasons, by far the largest reason is family breakdown and the huge rise in births out of wedlock.

According to some particular statistics:

Approximately 30% of all children are born into single-parent homes;

Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, poor educational performance, teen pregnancy, and criminality;

Over half of all children living with a single mother are living in poverty, a rate 5 to 6 times that of kids living with both parents;

Child abuse is significantly more likely to occur in single parent homes than in intact families;

63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes;

72% of adolescent murderers grew up without fathers;

60% of rapists grew up the same way according to a study by D. Cornell (et al.), in Behavioral Sciences and the Law;

71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes;

In single-mother families, about 66% of young children live in poverty;

90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes;

85% of all children that exhibit behavioural disorders come from fatherless homes;

Of all violent crimes against women committed by intimates about 65% were committed by either boy-friends or ex-husbands, compared with 9 % by husbands;

Girls living with non-natal fathers (boyfriends and stepfathers) are at higher risk for sexual abuse than girls living with natal fathers;

Daughters of single mothers are 53% more likely to marry as teenagers, 111% more likely to have children as teenagers, 164% more likely to have a premarital birth and 92% more likely to dissolve their own marriages;

A large survey conducted in the late 1980s found that about 20% of divorced fathers had not seen their children in the past year, and that fewer than 50% saw their children more than a few times a year.

Juvenile crime, the majority of which is committed by males, has increased six-fold since 1992.

When it comes to the Christian community, the Pope was even more subtle. He said: "*The Church too needs fathers.*" Many parishes in general and many parish priests in particular are program oriented in contrast to people oriented. It is a pity to hear someone says that he or she was refused confession because the priest was busy. If he was busy with assisting a moribund could be understood, but being busy with the organisational or administrative work is surely a real sign for a pastoral conversion. Surely, the Church's need of fathers does not only refer to priests and parish priests, but also to every layman and laywoman who assume leading roles in the Church. And let us be clear, every baptised person is called to share in the pastoral mission of Jesus and have a leading role in life and in the Church. Just think of the mission of Christian parents. But if we are living in fatherless generations, then imagine the state of the Church!

c) A prophetic sign

Therefore, this Year of St Joseph is really a prophetic sign not only to the Church, but also to humanity.

In 1968, the students protests in the main universities all over the world, initiated a great cultural change. One of the targets was the patriarchal culture that had never been questioned or challenged in human history. However, this was sparked by the determination to fight paternalism in all forms of governance. It was as if everybody wanted to get rid of all the abuse of power, which is not found only in civil society but even in religious institutions, maybe worse because the abuse can be done in the name of God!

The consequence of this cultural movement is the loss of the father, that figure so important as a point of reference in human growth and formation. Calling the attention of men of today, especially of all Christians, to this very special father, St Joseph, Pope Francis is making a very timely appeal to rediscover the father figure that we have lost and that we cannot do without if we wish to rediscover our human dignity and purpose of our existence. This appeal is made first and foremost to us, who consider ourselves as devout of St Joseph, the Universal Patron of the Church.