

How to make yourself loved like a father by the members

Introduction:

Our members are entrusted to us by God and cell leaders are called to nurture their faith by actively living it. There is a saying that ‘faith is caught, not taught,’ and the most important people to make this happen in our parishes are cell leaders/every baptised person.

In this teaching we will focus on some of the qualities attributed to Saint Joseph, who is often called the Umbra Patris, the shadow of God the Father. This will help us understand the characteristics of human fatherhood which find their origin in God and the Father. As leaders of cells of evangelisation, we are encouraged to exhibit such characteristics towards our members.

Saint Joseph’s silence and obedience can serve as a unique source of inspiration and a model for how we can love our cell members. The following points can guide us in achieving these characteristics of fatherhood.

- First of all, put God first.
- Second, trust God’s will.

(Joseph’s ability to heed the Angel’s message to flee the wrath of King Herod demonstrates the complete trust and dependence on God which is necessary as mentioned in the previous points)

-As a result, we will live our faith together.

Joseph provides the ideal example for what it means to be a kind and loving father. In fact, in the apostolic letter published on the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as patron of the universal Church entitled Patris Corde, (“With a Father’s Heart”), Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father because he made an offering of himself in love and for his role in the story of salvation. In the same way, we as leaders are called to offer ourselves to the service of our members.

As Joseph was the foster father of Jesus, we as leaders can be foster fathers to our members. By taking up the responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of our members and accompanying them, similarly we become fathers to these persons that God has entrusted to us.

In imitating St. Joseph (Model of Father of families), we as leaders can create the ideal relationship with our members (oikos) who in turn will see in us this fatherly figure.

Love is a distinctive characteristic of fatherhood.

Love for others starts with surrendering oneself to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to produce this fruit in our life “the *fruit of the Spirit is love*” (Galatians 5:22). You can also learn to love people by following Jesus’s example. We are to “*follow Christ by loving as*

he loved you, giving himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2). Paul gave us an idea of what love looks like in ministry “and I am more than glad to spend what I have and to be spent for the sake of your souls. Is it because I love you so much more, that I am loved the less?” (2 Corinthians 12:15)

Loving your members means you do not love them only for what they do for you. Therefore, we give ourselves to and for them because we want their highest good. We care for each other and we will serve and sacrifice for them just like Joseph did for Mary and Jesus. Thus, just like Jesus did for us.

Loving others leads to developing genuine interest in people. Here’s a good daily reminder from St. Paul : “*Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests but those of others.*” (Philippians 2,3-4)

To love involves the virtue of humility,patience and silence.

Joseph was a cautious person, he did not rush in the decisions he took, he waited in silence and waited attentively for the opportune moment with humility. Once he has decided, he will not waste time and all his decisions are made through meditation. Joseph was that humble and righteous man who reflects what we find in Isaiah: ‘*Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have sent my spirit upon him, he will bring fair judgement to the nations. He does not cry out or raise his voice, his voice is not heard in the street; he does not break the crushed reed or snuff the faltering wick. Faithfully he presents fair judgement.*’ (Isaiah 42, 1-3)

In other words, Jesus saw in Joseph a reflection of his Father who is in heaven and this certainly is reflected in and had an influence on Jesus’ character.

We have to be servants, as Joseph, we should place ourselves to serve our members. We must see them through God’s eyes and most importantly we must pray for them. Although this may seem so basic sometimes it is easy to neglect or forget.

Another important characteristic of fatherhood, as shown by St. Joseph’s actions, is humility. For instance, in Sirach, we find these words on the humble man:

“My child be gentle in carrying out your business, and you will be better loved than a lavish giver. The greater you are, the more humbly you should behave, and then you will find favour with the Lord; for great though the power of the Lord is, he accepts the homage of the humble.” (Sirach 3.17-20)

Moreover, Dr Peter Kreeft (a philosopher who converted to Christianity) further describes humility as “Humility is “thy will be done.” Humility is focused on God, not self. Humility is not an exaggeratedly low opinion of yourself. Humility is self-forgetfulness. A humble man never tells you how bad he is. He’s too busy thinking about you to talk about himself.”

Personal experience

I would like to share with you my personal view.

In my experience of 47 years as a son, 18 years as a father and 6 years in the cells of evangelisation, I have learned that it's all about love and the importance of establishing a relationship where all parties feel loved. It is vital to mention that alongside every father there is a loving mother just like Joseph had Mary.

Just like anything in life we cannot be perfect. Therefore, I urge you; don't try to be the best father ever, you will never succeed, because there will always be a situation that you can handle better. Maybe something that can be done differently in order to be more understanding and supportive. It is normal to doubt whether you are doing a good enough job. What counts is that you are trying and you are not giving up!

An exemplary father understands his children without being too inquisitive and can sense if something is wrong. This is because they both trust each other. Therefore, he never judges and will wait for the right moment to correct with a smile or even with a joke. A good father never discourages his children and is there to lend a helping hand. In order to be a good leader, one has to have these qualities and so he will be loved for what he is and represents. Saint Joseph was a master at this.

A good father should be gentle in certain situations and strong in others (able to adapt), he should be careful in what he says and keeps his promises. Moreover, he can be understood without using too many words to explain himself. Instead, he gives a lesson with his doing and behaviour, a good example can give a lesson for life.

In Malta, we have a saying “skont iz-zokk il-fergha” which literally means the condition of the stem reflects that of its branches.

I know that every situation is different and it's easier said than done but the only thing we can do to be loved by others; is to love them even more. In Corinthians, Paul gives us a complete definition of love:

“Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances.

Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but finds its joy in the truth.

It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.

Love never comes to an end. “ (1Cor 13,4-8)

We can see this love exhibited by Joseph. We as leaders, are called to be inspired from his actions and follow his steps in spiritually accompanying our members.

Conclusion:

St. Joseph led by example we often think that we primarily influence others by what we say, when so often we are watched for our actions – actions speak louder than words. If we want to make ourselves loved like a father by the members, we must set the example. This, maybe, is the most important thing of all. Certainly, nothing works without setting an example first because this will lead others to love us.

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

Being a good leader isn't just about applying and/or teaching principles. In essence, it's living principles in front of those people whereby they feel loved and accompanied. Consequently, this is the spirit of evangelisation; the need Cell Members feel to share this love with their Oikos.

We teach the principles, live them, and reproduce them in somebody else. This is the Christian life. This is how to make a disciple.

Our responsibility as leaders is to always point our members towards Jesus. The goal of a true leader is for Jesus' influence to increase in the life of the members. A leader's main desire is to see his members in an intimate relationship with Christ. Our goal is realised when the members are transformed into the image and maturity of Christ, where the members can be eventual leaders and form others.

Making ourselves loved like a father by the members is not something we can achieve with our own abilities. We must realise that it is our relationship to the Heavenly Father as His beloved children that will allow Him to work through us to love our oikos. In conclusion, looking to the silent saint as a role model helps to remind us of the importance of asking the Lord for help to aid us in making ourselves loved like a father.

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