

# Duties of a Husband and Father



HE SACRED HEART OF JESUS promised St. Margaret Mary that He would give those consecrated to Him *all the graces necessary in their state of life*. At Lourdes and Fatima, we have been commanded to do *Penance! Penance! Penance!* To clarify this repeated threefold request, His Majesty later came to Sr. Lucia, saying: *"the sacrifice required for every person is the fulfillment of his duties in life and the observance of My law. This is the penance that I now seek and require."* Many fail to complete this penance because they do not know their duties beyond those basic ones owed to God and His Church as indicated in the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. Here, then, is a summary of the social duties of a husband and father according to reliable moral handbooks and catechisms, but principally from the writings of St. Peter Julian Eymard (cf., *Eucharistic Handbook*). Note that some things covered here for the head of the family (e.g., matters of education and correction of children) are also shared by the heart of the family, the wife and mother.

*Duties towards his family.* – The first duty of the head of the family is to attend to the sanctification of his dependents. Nature imposes it on him; God wills it; his salvation depends on it. This duty presents itself to him under a triple aspect, corresponding to his three titles of husband, father, and of provider (be it employer or employee).

*The man's duties as a husband.* –

He should honor his wife, and love her, and help her to sanctify herself. A husband should honor his wife as Jesus Christ honors His Church, and that especially in the presence of his children, that they also may learn to love and respect their mother, and women in general. He also has the duty of honoring her in the presence of strangers and acquaintances, for how else will they show her due honor?

A husband should love his wife as his own body, as himself. Just as man seeks that which will make his body and life flourish, so too he ought to strive after that which will enable his wife to flourish in joy and peace. The sweetness of his love should temper the force of the authority, which God gave him when He made him the head of the wife, as Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church.

His love should be tender and pure, with God as its motive and end; vigilant and devoted, giving with kindness to his spouse all that she needs to live and to keep her position, supporting her in infirmities and defects with a tender charity, and sharing her joys and sorrows with compassion.

A husband should seek sanctification with his wife.

He himself must serve as a means of sanctification for her, and ought to make it a priority to pray with her. It is especially by his good example, and the sweetness of his virtue and charity, that a husband will win the esteem and affection of his wife and sustain her in the right path.

St. John Chrysostom says: "Observe that Paul has exhorted husbands and wives to reciprocity...To love therefore, is the husband's part, to yield pertains to the other side. If, then, each one contributes his own part, all stand firm. From being loved, the wife too becomes loving; and from her being submissive, the husband learns to yield."

Since man is not composed only of a body, but also of soul and spirit, the husband should work at establishing a

union with his wife that is not just physical, but also emotional and spiritual. Men must remember that women need emotional support and friendship from their husband. The spousal bond is meant to unite a man and a woman at every level, including the emotional and spiritual, which ought not be neglected.

The godly husband does not use the marriage act for purposes of lust or sensuality (cf. *Tobias 6:16-17 vulgate*), but rather keeps within those limits which are reasonable and serious without purposely impeding procreation. A reasonable and serious request for the marriage duty is made with a definite, sober will, not too frequent and without the presence of any obstacles of bodily health. Such a request obliges the other party, in justice, to render the debt, as St. Paul says: *"Let every man give his wife what is her due, and every woman do the same by her husband"* (1 Cor. 7:3).

At the same time, however, it should be remembered that the same Apostle also admonishes the husband: *They that have wives, let them be as though they had them not* (1 Cor. 7:29), and that St. Jerome says: *The love which a wise man cherishes towards his wife is the result of judgment, not the impulse of passion; he governs the impetuosity of desire, and is not hurried into indulgence. There is nothing more shameful than that a husband should love his wife as an adulteress.*

As every blessing is to be obtained from God by holy prayer, the faithful couple ought sometimes abstain from the marriage debt, in order to devote themselves to prayer. This religious continence is particularly recommended during the solemn fast of Lent.

*A man's duties as a father.* – The duties of a father towards children are great; their object is to make of them good and manly Christians, useful citizens, and saints for heaven. These duties are threefold: to raise children in the fear of God, to correct them, and to settle them decently in the world.

*Education.* – The body is made for the soul, and the soul for God, Who enlightens it with the truths of faith



and beautifies it with holiness. The mother begins this religious education: the father completes and consolidates it. The grace of authority and of strength lends extra power to his words. The example of the mother persuades the children; that of the father wins them over. Hence the saying of the Holy Ghost: *like father, like son.*

A father should then before all else endeavor to give his children a Christian education as a solid and indispensable foundation for an honest station in life and for a successful future. He should give a very special attention to the morality of the schools, of the houses of education, to which he intends confiding the innocence and weakness of his children. *Innocence of life and purity of faith* outweigh all the wealth of the world: they are preferable to all the dignities and sciences, especially when these are corrupt and faithless.

The educating of children by their parents needs to extend to matters of chastity. Some moralists believe that educating the young in matters touching on chastity (6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Commandments) should be indirect. They hold that it is dangerous to speak of these matters to the young, that silence itself is to them a lesson of modesty, that the practice of piety and mortification, along with parental watchfulness, will keep them pure, and that sufficient knowledge will come at the proper time as God will provide. Others reject this theory as opposed to the tradition of the Church as well as to experience. The defenders of direct education point to the evil of silence: the bad habits contracted and grown strong before their sinfulness is understood, or the scruples and misery into which ignorance will plunge young people entering the time of puberty, the false and corrupt ideas which immoral companions, physicians, and educators will unavoidably indoctrinate the minds of the innocent, the overpowering and corrupting influence of today's mass media, the loss of confidence in parents who have refused to impart important knowledge and advice, and the ruin of innocent lives by seducers which a timely word of warning would have prevented. Hence, there is an invincible ignorance which cannot be removed without direct education, and this ignorance is more harmful, at least to well-reared children, than any evil that may be caused by the education itself. Yet this education should only be conducted by the parents.

Training for purity of body should be directed both to the will and the intellect, for knowledge without character is powerless against temptation. Children should be trained from the beginning *morally*. This includes keeping them as much as possible from sources of contamination; teaching them to have implicit confidence in parents; and accustoming them to bring their questions and difficulties to the parents. Fathers must also train their children to be manly by practicing

continual mortification and restraint and to struggle against evil tendencies until the habit of self-control becomes second nature.

Children must also be formed *religiously*, which includes learning to pray and developing the habit of daily prayer, fidelity to and proper use of the Sacraments, sacramentals, devotions, and other means of grace until they are well formed in piety. Trained in this way, they will stand on guard more readily and manfully against the suggestions of indulgence which initiation into worldly and bodily pleasures ceaselessly propose.

As for the subject matter itself, the instruction ought to include the diversity of the sexes, its origin from God and its dignity, the beginning of life in plants and animals, the organs of reproduction (obviously done with some care), the functions of maternity and paternity, the grave reasons that demand sexual morality be observed, respect for women, the great sinfulness and harm of self-abuse, the meaning of puberty in both sexes, the possibility of healthfulness of continence and self-control, the moral dangers of the world and the social diseases to be guarded against.

Clearly not all of these concepts can be imparted at one time, for young children would not understand or there would be scandal of little ones. Moreover, while fiction and exaggeration should be avoided, a strictly scientific and technical instruction is not necessary or generally advisable either. It is clear also that parents, and especially mothers, are naturally suited for the delicate task of early guardians of chastity, though the later instruction should be supplemented by sound sermons, solid catechism classes, and individual advice given in the confessional.

*Correction.* – The duty of correction consists in rectifying the child of his defects, in protecting him against scandal, and in watching over his friendships. The child is full of defects; his vices grow with age. The main point

is to detect them at the start in order to mitigate them and then always to be watchful towards preventing their growth.

In order to be fair, the correction of a child should be *calm*. The correction that is administered in an outburst of indignation or ill-temper does more harm than good (this point can hardly be stressed too much).

Correction should be *reasonable*, that is, proportioned to the offense; yet it is better to be more lenient than too severe as that is God's way of working with us. The vital thing is to show the youthful offender the reason for the correction and punishment of his fault, and the evil of it, in order to train his mind to hate and shun evil and to esteem and love the good. As every experienced parent knows, a child matures well when the love of virtue and the hatred of vice comes from within.

Correction must be *kind*. Parental love must always be evident in the correction, even the most severe, so that it



may bring about the humble and contrite return of the child, and that the delinquent may never lose sight of the love of his father, who is bound by duty to reprimand and punish him for his own good.

Correction should be *dignified*. The father is a leader. He should respect and inspire respect for the authority of God vested in him. If he should avoid undue severity—which crushes and discourages—he should still more avoid weakness which breeds contempt. Let the father be dignified in his speech, discreet in action (especially when in public places), noble and patient in hoping for reform, and kind in granting forgiveness.

A father should protect his children against scandal, which awakens in them the dormant idea of evil; it is the father's compelling duty to shield his children against its fatal strokes. Children's natural inquisitiveness, ignorance, weakness, and tendency to copy others out of human respect, all make it easy for them to sin and form bad habits.

As the child's reason develops, the father should caution him prudently but forcefully against the inevitable scandal awaiting him in the world: *prudently*, by instilling in him a horror of evil, denounced first in general, then more in detail according to the strength of the child's virtue and the extent of the danger; *forcefully*, by the power of faith, of love and of honor.

Let the father be strict in his prohibition of dangerous books and other forms of media, which leave an indelible impression in the memory. Let him be firm in forbidding bad company; the strongest virtue cannot hold its own very long against this deadly peril.

Happy the child whom a firm and kind hand has guided at the first awakening of his passions and sustained in the midst of his early struggles. He will bless eternally the love that saved him by preserving his virtue from a sad and unfortunate catastrophe. This virtue alone is worth more than all the natural and material goods a father could ever bestow upon his children.

The father must also watch with care over the friendships of his offspring. The heart needs friendship. The child who loves especially his father and mother, and later his brothers and sisters, leads a pure and happy life. Father and mother must unite in their efforts to instill and foster in their children the spirit and love of family life. In this way, children will truly be happy in the midst of their family and seek such happiness in their own future families (either as parents or as religious).

Fathers must also be on guard against any division the children may perceive between him and his wife. Children are adept at exploiting parental disagreement to their own advantage. This causes much turmoil between spouses and allows the child to develop a spirit of duplicity and selfishness. A father must, therefore, be vigilant to 'nip in the bud' such behavior. He should ensure that any disagreements with his wife are dealt with in private (away from the children) and that he and his wife always present a united front, saying in so many words: "Your mother and I are one: what she commands, I command; if you disobey and disrespect her, then you also disobey and disrespect me."

Danger begins with the awakening of self-love, or when the young man lives far from home. Let his parents

strengthen him then against false friends by tightening ever more the bonds of filial love. If they hear of the dangers of friendship, let them first advise, then command, and as a last resort threaten severely. Let the parents rather break with the child than condone mortal sin; otherwise their child will be lost and their name disgraced. It is better to strike hard when there is still hope than to wait for disgrace and death. Sooner or later filial love will score a happy comeback. Many saints heard their parents say: "I would rather have you dead at my feet than ever commit a mortal sin." From their youth, a father should teach his child: "Never force me to pick between God and you (i.e. to accept your sin), for I will always have to choose God."

*Settling one's children in life.* – Although one's vocation comes from God, it is nevertheless the duty of parents to test and direct it. They should test it, for the will of God is not always clear and sure. They must not judge of a vocation from the capricious and unstable imaginings of a young man. They should study his character, his natural dispositions, the capacity of his intelligence, the soundness of his judgment, and the strength of his will. This much done, they should consult a wise, experienced man, pray, trust in God, before taking a definite course of action.

If the father senses his son has abilities leading to a professional career, he should not, out of prudence, make his observations known to his son at the beginning of his studies; but he should merely insist on success in the required subjects. If when the time to make a decision has come, the young man has not yet shown real fitness for this or that profession and has not justified his own intentions with serious reasons, the father should then make known his observations and suggestions. And in such a case he has the right to insist that it at least be tried.

If the young man were drawn to the sublime vocation of the priesthood and had the necessary qualities, his father has, it is true, the right to try the dispositions of his son, but not the right to oppose himself to the sure marks of a vocation. God has the first choice, and Christian parents owe to their conscience and to their love for God the homage of what is dearest to them in the world. Pleased with their sacrifice, God will pay them a hundredfold for the immolation of their son who, belonging henceforth to God, will be the consolation, the glory and happiness of their family. This also holds for a daughter called by God to the religious life.

If called to holy matrimony, the wisdom and prudence of parents must guide their children, especially in the choice of their spouse. A father should above all exact virtue and religion in the one to be admitted into his family; he should prefer virtue to fortune. A father has a particular solicitude in ensuring that only honorable and virtuous men are permitted to court his daughters. Although the wisdom of parents should direct their children's choice of a spouse, Christian prudence however forbids them to impose their choice and to contradict with violence a sensible and virtuous affection. God is the One Who joins Christian hearts together, and brings happiness into a family by His blessing.

*His duties as an employer.* – A Christian employer should esteem and trust his employees. He should be just

and reasonable in his orders, kind and sympathetic to his workmen in their sorrows and illnesses, keeping in mind that they, too, are made in the image of God. A Christian employee should strive to provide the services for which he is employed and paid. Also, a child, even though subject to parental authority, seems to have a right to compensation for extraordinary services rendered to his parents.

*His duties towards society.* — In the order willed by Divine Providence, every man has his social duties to perform, whereby he may glorify His Majesty, Jesus Christ, before the world. These duties entail certain obligations: in the functions of his calling; in his relations of business; and in his relations of friendship.

*Functions of his calling.* — Duties are hierarchically ordered. After acquitted himself of the duties of piety toward God and His Church, a husband and father must then limit himself to the duties owed to his wife and children until some stability has been attained in them. Even if he has the time and the means to help his neighbor, he should nevertheless always subordinate his exterior zeal and his charity to the duties of his state. Duty is a matter of *precept*, the remainder (e.g., works of mercy) only a matter of *counsel*. A well-ordered charity begins at home; and enlightened zeal will spend itself first on one's own family.

*Relations in business.* — Every man should develop the talent which Divine Providence has entrusted to him, and make his work profitable and fruitful; such is the will of God. The love of truth and justice in all his business dealings must be the unbreakable rule of one who serves His Majesty.

*Love of truth.* — God is Truth, and He loves and blesses truth only; truth is the constant and faithful homage He demands from man in all his works. Truth will never do man any harm, whereas twisted and half-truths will. At times it may humiliate his pride, contradict the aims of his self-love, and check his passions; but if Truth triumphs in his heart, it will be his glory. Thus, all double-dealing and lying is to be shunned. The man who has self-respect loathes such things; the Christian ought to flee them as vices that are an abomination before God.

The godly husband and father will adopt truth as the unchanging rule of his conduct, even were his pride or his interests to suffer dearly for it. If truth is safeguarded, then his honor is safe and God is glorified. On occasion prudence may call for reserve and discretion in his speech so as not to reveal a matter that is detrimental to justice or to charity, or perhaps only untimely; on the other hand, truth in action must always be the rule of his judgments and of his conscience.

*Love of justice.* — To respect the rights of all, to act always according to the rule of equity, to do to others what we hold they should do to us, such is the natural

and Christian law of justice. We should never defend the cause of falsehood and of iniquity against the just cause of virtue and of truth, even were we to pay for it with the loss of friends and worldly goods. We should never stain our hands with the property of others or with unlawful gains. The honor of integrity and the peace of soul are worth more than all ill-gotten wealth. We should undertake with courage the defense of outraged truth, of violated justice, and oppressed virtue. Such are the duties of a just and righteous man. Such was the rule of conduct of the holy man Job, whom God rewarded by showering him with honors and riches.



*Relations of friendship.* — A true friend is a priceless treasure; but we must pick him out among thousands, and put him to the test before confiding in him. There is a friendship of honor, which vanishes when humiliation strikes; a friendship of interest, which changes into hostility and reveals the defects of its friends; a friendship of pleasure, which ignores its friends in their hour of need. The friendship of a father should be prudent in its choice and faithful in its affection.

*Prudent in its choice.* — A true friend is hard to find; a false friend is dangerous. The Catholic man should, as much as possible, select his faithful friends from among fellow-Catholics. The mutual feeling of their soul, and their oneness of mind and heart in the love of Jesus Christ, will add to the sweetness and sacredness of that bond.

*Faithful in his affection.* — Nothing is so sensitive as the heart of a friend. We must know how to give this "other self" some proofs of trust and esteem, how to defend his reputation as our own; how to further his advantage in a disinterested manner; and how to help him in the hour of adversity. But, above all, we must advise him charitably of his faults, for that is the real proof of friendship. A man must sustain his friend in the practice of virtue; strengthen him in the dangers his soul will face; and lastly bring him Christ-like assistance at death.

**A**T FATIMA, the angel, depicted in the vision part of the Third Secret, repeated the request of Our Lady of Lourdes: *Penance! Penance! Penance!* With this penance performed, the heavenly Queen is depicted in the same vision as putting out the flames of God's wrath coming upon the world! If Christian husbands and fathers do penance according to their duties of state, they will surely be aided by God's grace in all their endeavors and receive the protection of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts against all dangers, as well as help Our Lady in fulfilling the Fatima promises... *"In the end, My Immaculate Heart with triumph."*

