

Dad's day is everyday

By Mar Muñoz Visoso

In the Catholic tradition fathers are honored in the feast of Saint Joseph, spouse of Mary. In Spain, Italy, Portugal, Bolivia and Honduras, Father's Day is still celebrated on March 19, a custom that brings together the civic and religious traditions. However, most Latin American countries celebrate it on the third Sunday of June, originally June 19, following the U.S. civic celebration, which was begun by Sonora Smart Dodd in Spokane, Washington, in 1910.

Sonora, as well as the civil authorities that institutionalized this holiday decades later, acknowledged the need for honoring all good fathers, whose sacrifices often go unnoticed, with a special day in the same manner in which we honor mothers on Mother's Day.

We really owe them this celebration of gratitude and remembrance. But I think society and the Church owe them more than that. The father figure is fundamental for the family, and happy and committed fathers make a world of difference.

Fatherhood, however, is a responsibility which many men enter unprepared or without much thought, and many times with the feeling that fatherhood "just happened" to them. As the father of a friend used to say, "I learned all kinds of things in school, but they never taught me how to be a father."

Most parents I know have done the learning on the go, and I must say they have done fine. However, as with every vocation, a process of learning and discernment is needed, along with good advice and some mentoring.

This learning begins at home, with the experience we have of our own father, his presence or his absence, his involvement and the attitudes he shows toward the challenges the family has to confront.

Ideally, reflecting on fatherhood (and motherhood) would be part of every good marriage-prep program. Schools and religious education programs, youth and campus ministries also must find ways to include this topic in their curriculum.

Most Latinos still assume that marriage and family-- and thus fatherhood/motherhood-- go hand in hand. If you don't believe me, ask the Census Bureau. Hispanic marriages also tend to

stay together at a higher rate than other groups. However, there is also a high rate of out-of-wedlock births and many children being raised by a single parent, most often the mother.

We need to help men see the gift and responsibilities that fatherhood brings, and its gratifications; to encourage them to feel enthused about the prospect of entering such commitment.

Often men, especially young men, are thirsty for whatever can affirm them in their masculine identity and steer them away from negative forms of fatherhood and “machismo” they may have experienced or been raised with. They want honest advice to help them understand what is, or will be, expected of them as fathers, especially in a world where roles have shifted and the line of traditional responsibilities for fathers and mothers has become blurry. The most effective initiatives I’ve seen are those that mix theory with a healthy dose of dialogue and experience sharing from men to men, and from women to men and vice versa.

At home, a little affirmation and appreciation on a regular basis also go a long way. (Right honey? By the way, here is your honey-do list...)

Congratulations to all those men who every day give the best of themselves to their families; to the fathers who in spite of difficulties and shortcomings stay put and don’t give up; and to those who decide to jump in, even if the party did not start with them.

You are today’s society silent heroes. You are Joseph for today’s holy families.

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