



Fathers' Irreplaceable Role in Welcoming Life

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Although fathers do not physically carry their children from conception, fathers can still be overwhelmed by an unexpected pregnancy. We Christians must support men who, in following the example of St. Joseph, choose to embrace their role as a father in all circumstances, but especially in challenging situations. St. Joseph was unexpectedly called to fatherhood amid extremely confusing and difficult circumstances. However, despite many obstacles, St. Joseph chose to be faithful. St. Joseph chose life by listening to God's will and consciously deciding to be a father to Jesus, the Son of God. Pope Saint John Paul II said that fathers are called to exhibit "generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother" (*Familiaris consortio* 25). Like St. Joseph, all fathers are uniquely entrusted with the protection and defense of both mother and child and, in this way, safeguard the sanctity of human life. But biological fathers, because they do not physically carry the child, sometimes fail to truly father their children.

Our society increasingly tells fathers that they should have no say in the lives of their unborn children, no opportunity to choose to father their children. Our society seems to restrict the decisions regarding an unborn child solely to the discretion of the mother. In the face of false messages about fatherhood, we must respond with the truth that the role of a father "is of unique and irreplaceable importance" (*FC* 25). We know that the assistance and support of the father of a child, or lack thereof, can often be

a deciding factor in a woman's decision to choose life. Tragically, there are men who sometimes pressure mothers to make the decision to abort the child, sinning grievously and making the cowardly choice. These men are not following the example of St. Joseph and are not exercising true, spiritual fatherhood.

This is because fatherhood extends beyond simple procreation and biology. Fatherhood is first a spiritual reality, because fatherhood has its origins in God who chose to reveal Himself to us as Our Father, sending his only Son for the sake of our salvation. Fathers therefore have a special and unique role "in revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God" (*FC* 25). Fathers have a vital, unique, and important role to play in the personal and spiritual development of their children, and in reflecting the love of God the Father himself. Fathers are called to show the world the virtues of a tender protector, while living out the virtues of humility and courage.

In all circumstances, but especially in difficult circumstances, a father needs to be encouraged to faithfully accept the role entrusted to him by God and support the mother of his child. Through our prayers and through the intercession of St. Joseph, patron of fathers, may fathers come to know the *irreplaceable* role they hold in the lives of their children, and the responsibility they share in welcoming God's gift of new life!

At the time of writing, Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre was Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux, chairman of the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee against Racism, and a member of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

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