

CRISIS OF MASCULINITY

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

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When Pilate presented Jesus scourged and wearing a crown of thorns, hoping to evoke a reaction of sympathy among the Jews, he said: *Ecce homo*—"Behold, the man!"¹ The Latin word he used in referring to Jesus, *homo*, has the generic meaning "human being." But it also can more specifically mean "male human being." In saying *Ecce homo*, Pilate was saying, "Behold, I give you a man," stripped, beaten, loathed and rejected. Little did he know that he was giving them the most perfect example of what a man should be.

As Christians we worship a man, who is not only God, but also the ideal model of masculinity. Ironically, western society, which is founded on the religion he gave us, is now experiencing a grave crisis of masculinity. And it is sad to admit, particularly on this day, when we especially remember fathers, that it is to a great extent because of this crisis of masculinity, that we are now also experiencing a similar crisis in fatherhood.

There may be many men today, who strut around as macho peacocks, but deep down many men are very insecure in their manhood. Although they may agree with the long-held understanding of a man's role as leader, protector and provider, they don't really think that way, nor do they operate that way.² The feminist movement's main objective may have been equal rights for women but one of the most tragic results has been the emasculation and feminization of men, which has resulted in a distortion of masculinity that either exalts violence or turns men into indecisive wimps.³ Women, who detest manhood, do so because they hate the masculinity of Jesus.

But in the end, the feminist agenda has turned out to be nothing more than an ideology that is a denial of reality. Men and women are very different. They always have been and always will be. Men think differently than women, they act different than women and they express themselves differently than women. Forcing them to do otherwise only breeds confusion and does violence to the very core of their identity. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, better known to many as Edith Stein, one of the greatest Catholic philosophers of the twentieth century, felt that our identity as masculine or feminine went so deep, that this difference is even imprinted on our soul.

"The human race has not changed since the days of Homer and Moses; men and women have not changed. And the mysteries of manhood and womanhood have been probed in literature for thousands of years."⁴ The grand feminist revolution has been trying to change something that is unchangeable and the result has only been mass confusion among many men and distortions of who they really are.

In his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II referred to four archetypes that form "the natural psychological basis of masculinity," which because of original sin and disordered conditioning in the home and society, have been distorted. But it is important that we cultivate healthy expressions of these four archetypes because they are the foundation for the ultimate masculine identity of priest, prophet, and king, which finds its perfect expression in Christ, the perfect man.⁵

The first archetype is the king, "an image put inside men by God the Father." The king "creates order in the family, the church, and society;" he encourages and blesses

those under his authority; he is called to “servant leadership.” Its distortion is either the confused weak king, unwilling or unable to lead, and controlled by the Queen, or a masculinity characterized by authoritarianism, harshness, cruelty and control.⁶

The second archetype is the warrior, who is ready and willing to “defend and protect” not only himself, but those who are dependent on him or weaker than he. He fights “for the honor of God, without fear or hatred of the enemy.” The distortion of this archetype is either the fearful or cowardly man, unable or unwilling to protect his family or his faith, or the man who is verbally and physically abusive to his wife and children.⁷

The third archetype is the lover, not in a romantic or sexual sense, but one who loves from the heart with Christian love, who is always there for his wife. He is quick to forgive and quick to ask for forgiveness. He doesn’t allow his wife to manipulate him nor does he try to control her. The distortion is either a man who is remote, undemonstrative or, impotent or one who is obsessed with sex, pornography, promiscuous when single, adulterous when married, and enslaved to lust.⁸

The last archetype is the wise guide or counselor, a man who has, and is able to convey, spiritual knowledge. Its distortion is a man who gives false advice, speaks half-truths, or who propagates evil or erroneous ideologies; a man who claims ignorance, has nothing to say, refuses to guide, or forsakes his obligations as spiritual head of the family.⁹

Despite the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was a man and that the gospels clearly take his maleness for granted,¹⁰ the feminists have tried to feminize Him, making of Him an androgynous being, who plays with children or stares lovingly into the eyes of a lamb nestled in His arm. How easily they forget the Jesus, who made a whip to drive the money changers out of His Father’s temple. “Jesus Christ was the most courageous, masculine man ever to walk the earth. But, “we’ve turned Him into a wimp.”¹¹ He, who is also God, represents perfect masculinity: nobility, self-control, and courage in the face of death.¹² We need to learn from Christ, the ultimate man, what true masculinity really is.

The first thing that men can learn is not to be embarrassed by their manhood. It is holy! It has been created by God, and for a reason.¹³ “Jesus [loved] women, as all good men must. He [obeyed] his mother at Cana, but He didn’t hang around the skirts of women. He [spoke] gently, but as a man speaks gently, and when he [rebuked], he rebuked forthrightly and clearly, as a man.”¹⁴ His closest comrades were men, whom He organized into a battalion of sacrifice, who were willing to fearlessly give up their lives for the sake of a man, who loved them to the death.¹⁵

Human masculinity represents the fatherhood of God, who “actively initiates,” who generates life and who “continues to sustain with love and power.” The essence of masculinity, then, is to act and to generate life in a sacrificial giving in the spirit of courage and self-sacrifice for the sake of love.¹⁶ And by virtue of his masculine nature a man generates life for the sake others by giving a part of himself—his sweat, his seed, his blood. In this spirit men are called to action, to leadership and to self-sacrificial love. In a culture increasingly confused about and hostile to such ideals, we need to recapture the true essence of masculinity.¹⁷ A man must be leader, protector and provider, who lays down his life and who sacrifices. A true man is one who sacrifices and dies to himself for the sake of others rather than someone who pushes others around. A man must consider

his life dispensable for the sake of those he leads and protects. Christ Himself, who was God, did no less.

Catholicism is counter-cultural and a Catholic understanding of masculinity is one of the most counter-cultural ideas in today's world, which wants nothing to do with it, and which often considers masculinity a dirty word. But a Catholic understanding of masculinity is the fulfillment of what being a man is. A man fulfills his masculinity through the cultivation of a deeper bond with Christ, learning to become more like Him and opening himself to His influence, particularly through the Eucharist, in order to become what he beholds.¹⁸ And just as Jesus in the Gospels is often described as devoting entire nights to solitary prayer, and frequently rises early to pray alone before dawn, every Catholic man has to devote himself to becoming a prayerful person, willing to make the necessary sacrifices to be alone with "his Father" in prayer.¹⁹

In today's gospel, we heard Jesus say, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."²⁰ He addressed this to all Christians but in particular to men, to His apostles. We, as men, need to follow in their footsteps and pick up our cross in order to lose our lives for the sake of those, whom we love.

In a society that tells us to be self-absorbed and self-indulgent, we instead, have to rediscover the masculine identity in selfless sacrifice for the sake of others in imitation of Christ the man, priest, prophet and king. *Ecce homo*—Behold the man.

¹ John 19:5.

² Quote from Father Phillip Chavez found in: Pentin, Edward, "The Man's Place; Mary's Mysteries," Zenit, 21 May 2009. (<http://www.zenit.org/article-25959?l=english>)

³ Laurence, Lianne, "The making of a man," *Catholic Insight*, February 2006. (http://catholicinsight.com/online/social/article_646.shtml)

⁴ Interview With English Professor Anthony Esolen, "Finding the Masculine Genius," *Zenit*, 23 April 2007. (<http://www.zenit.org/article-19444?l=english>)

⁵ Laurence, "The making."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Finley, Mitch, *For Men Only: Strategies for Living Catholic*. Taken from book review by Philip F. Kelly, Jr. "A Few More Good Men," *Touchstone*, November/December 1999.

<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=12-06-051-b>)

¹¹ "Saving Robinson Crusoe," *Catholic Ministry: A continuing education publication of the Diocese of Brownville*, volume XX, number 3, Winter 2008.

¹² Conway, M., *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb050/is_2_78/ai_n32098852/)

¹³ Interview, "Finding."

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Laurence, "The making."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Finley, *For Men Only*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Luke 9:23-24.