

THE QUIET MAN: A MODEL FOR CATHOLIC MEN

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It is easy to forget about St. Joseph in the midst of the Christmas story. Joseph is quiet. He speaks no words in the Gospels. Mark skips him entirely. But Joseph was not some still statue at the back of the crèche. He was an active father, standing guard over the Holy Family. Yes, Joseph had doubts and fears, but he was righteous and loved Mary. When she came to him pregnant he protected her from shame. He responded without hesitating to do God's will, made known to him in dreams by angels who said, "Be not afraid." Joseph protected Jesus, bravely taking his family as refugees into Egypt, and then to Nazareth where he raised Jesus up in his craft, the Scriptures, the Law, and worship, leading Him to pray in Jerusalem every year at Passover.

Unleash the Gospel aims to help both men and women understand our identity as Christian parents (Action Step 1.2.5). The Pastoral Letter is also emphatic that "the role of fathers in particular is essential, since one of the greatest factors influencing a child's future practice of the faith is the religious involvement of his or her father" and this "role is absolutely irreplaceable" (Marker 7.2). We know from our own experiences that families become separated and relationships strained. This Christmas, and with resolve for the New Year, let the fathers among us pray for the Grace to deepen relationships with their sons and daughters, no matter how old they are and regardless of circumstances.

Be not afraid.

Fathers and father-figures - grandfathers, godfathers, uncles and family friends - should be good examples and active mentors for the children, teens and young adults in our parish. Instruct them in virtue; lead them every week to worship at Mass; guide them to the Sacraments; pray with them; read Scripture with them; encourage them, especially to know Jesus. **There is "no greater gift [parents] can give their children than a relationship with Jesus and his Church ..."** (Marker 7.2).

St. Joseph appeared with Mary at Knock in Ireland in 1879 and at Fatima in 1917. Still he did not speak. But he is always ready to help. A Novena to Our Lady of Knock includes this intercessory prayer to St. Joseph:

St. Joseph, Chosen by God to be the Husband of Mary, Protector of the Holy Family and Guardian of the Church, Protect all families in their work and recreation, and Guard us on our journey through life. Amen.