

19 March 2021

### Writings: Husbands

*The angel said "Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife" (Matt. 1:20).*

When I was growing up the role of a husband within a Marriage was pretty well defined. Husbands provided the bulk of a couple's income. For this reason, they were often the ones who had more influence when it came to making major decisions. They also did most of the chores outside the home such as shovelling out the driveway after a snowfall or mowing the lawn as well as small repair or maintenance jobs around the house. Today, things have changed. Most couples now rely on both spouses working to make ends meet. Husbands often help with chores like doing the laundry or preparing meals. Wives expect to have equal input into making major decisions. Although the exterior signs of a husband's role had changed over the years, one thing has remained constant: a husband's primary role is to be there for his wife, especially in difficult times. Sadly, not all husbands do so.

In today's Gospel, Joseph learns that his wife is pregnant and he is not the biological father. When the angel Gabriel reveals this situation is part of God's plan, Joseph must decide whether he can take on the role of husband and father.

Although Joseph is only engaged (betrothed) to Mary, his situation is essentially identical to that of a husband. As a righteous man, he has no choice but to end the relationship. He cannot simply look the other way because an offence had been committed against God as pointed out in the Jewish Law. Yet, he had a choice. He could have Mary stoned to death for adultery or quietly divorce. Since Joseph loves her, he chooses the latter. Just as he has decided on what he will do, the angel disrupts everything. The pregnancy is not an offence against God but part of the Divine plan. The act of faith required of Joseph was likely as great as that of Mary believing she could become a mother without the help of a man. Still, Joseph had a choice to make. It is highly unlikely that family, friends and neighbours would believe what really happened. By taking on the role of Mary's husband, Joseph would be taking a great risk and would have to trust both God and her that somehow everything would work out fine. The only person in a more awkward situation than Joseph was Mary. Joseph would not abandon her. It was the moment he defined the kind of husband he was.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, many people have faced a situation similar to that of Joseph. One minute life is calm but then something happens which overturns it. Maybe a loved one tests positive for the virus. The person gets rushed to the hospital and is soon in an ICU bed struggling to breathe. The lives of the patient, family and friends are in turmoil. The uncertainty about what will occur next seems overwhelming. Decisions have to be made which have serious consequences. Then, there comes a moment of clarity. They will go through this together. Covid 19 can't take away their trust in God and love for each other.

Being a husband these days is not usually as dramatic as the situation I just described. Yet, every serious relationship involves accepting the unpredictability of life. It requires coping with the reality we cannot always control it the way we would desire. It demands the willingness to trust God and another person. It means developing the ability to not worry about what family, friends or neighbours think when it is the right thing to do. Sadly, I think many husbands would like their role to be the way it was years ago when paying the mortgage and cutting the grass pretty well summed it up.

Joseph is a good role model for husbands because he became comfortable with what was clearly uncomfortable. Perhaps he recognized the challenge of being a good husband was what made it worthwhile. Mary and Jesus benefitted from it. I hope more husbands do the same for their wives and children.

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