

Editorial: Our nation, our Church needs the leadership of strong fathers

Even though we are finally creeping up on its halfway point, 2020 still seems like the year that will never end. What started as a year certain to be dominated by a presidential campaign and election has turned into a year of pandemic, economic woes, joblessness and continued racial strife. Struggling to find balance, perspective and truth, we are a society and a Church deeply in need of strong fathers.

In our Catholic tradition, fathers occupy a critical role in both arenas. In our homes, fathers are called to lead the family by example – to love their spouses as Christ loved the Church (that is, to give their very lives for them) and to raise their children in the Faith, relying on the dual pillars of truth and mercy. Within our Church, priests are the spiritual fathers of their flocks, be it at the parish, diocesan or universal level. They are called to receive holy orders so they may continue the mission of the Church by bringing Christ, via the sacraments, to his people.

At this time in our history, our fathers, both at home and in parishes, inspired by the example of St. Joseph, are positioned perfectly to take up the mantle. Consider some of the examples we already have seen when it comes to racial justice.

In a livestreamed conversation with the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, reported on by The Catholic Spirit, local black Catholic Ryan Hamilton said that race-related violence is “evil unchecked,” and that the Church should work to be part of the solution. But when it comes to leading his family, he has a different plan. Ever since he experienced a

conversion around age 30, Hamilton said he has “led with his Catholicism” as his identity. He wants to teach the same lessons to his two young children. “I’m going to tell my kids they’re Catholic: That’s your race, that’s your identity,” he said. “I’m going to teach them to lead with that.” That is strong fatherhood in action.

Our own Scott Warden, managing editor of Our Sunday Visitor, [wrote recently about a conversation](#) he had with his white children about race and racial prejudice. “We sat our kids down and told them about George Floyd and how he begged for his life, begged for his mother. We talked about the goodness of police officers and how if there is ever a situation that scares them, they should find an officer and trust them to help you, and they will. We talked about Black Lives Matter and how hard it must be to always be on alert, aware of your surroundings, constantly concerned for your safety because of the color of your skin.” That is strong fatherhood in action.

In one of his last acts before his retirement was accepted by Pope Francis this month, Bishop Curtis Guillory, SVD, of Beaumont, Texas, who is black, drew an important distinction between what should and shouldn’t be acceptable when it comes to standing against injustice.

“Action is needed now to counteract racism and injustice, but violence, looting and burning buildings are not the actions to be taken,” he wrote in a statement. “Instead, our actions – yours and mine – should be a courageous call for justice, community prayer that calls us together in our diversity, and honest dialogue so that we can have a more just society.” That is strong fatherhood in action.

In the U.S. bishops’ 2018 pastoral letter against racism, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love,” the bishops wrote that efforts to change hearts about racism must be active in families and in parishes. They directed priests and deacons to preach regularly about racism and its impact in

society. In homes, they encouraged families to respect the dignity of others in private conversations and to make a point to expose children to different cultures and peoples. This work takes strong, committed fathers.

As we prepare to honor our fathers this Father's Day, we thank our priests and Catholic dads for the work they have done to help our society and our Church through this difficult time. And we encourage them to keep it up by continuing to lead by example. Our nation needs you. Our Church needs you. Your children need you.

Our Sunday Visitor Editorial Board: Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott P. Richert, Scott Warden, York Young