

The impact of pregnancy loss on fathers

I've long considered St. Joseph my patron saint. Many times, I have turned to him when discerning major [life decisions](#), and I've experienced important subtle blessings on his feast day. But in the past year, his patronage has meant even more.

Last spring, I was sitting in the car outside the hospital waiting for my wife, Carolyn. She had recently taken a positive pregnancy test for the first time. Earlier that day, we had excitedly discussed announcing our pregnancy in Mother's Day cards. She was now inside the hospital undergoing her first ultrasound, while I was in the car, unable to enter the hospital due to COVID-19 precautions.

When the appointment ended, she rushed out, tears streaming down her face. "There's nothing there," she said as she grabbed hold of me. "There's nothing there."

Her words knocked the wind out of me. This was the start of a difficult journey that has tested our [marriage and faith](#), but ultimately strengthened us in both. I've dealt with grief, numbness, guilt and loneliness. There are millions of men who travel this road with me, but there are surprisingly few resources for us.

In such situations, men have a [patron to turn to for help](#). St. Joseph knew difficult journeys. He knew great hardship and wrestled with how best to follow God's will. In this Year of St. Joseph, I've been reflecting on the ways that he is the perfect saint to accompany men who have lost a child in utero.

Faithfulness and righteousness

The lack of certainty regarding the future is one of the greatest challenges for fathers of children lost to

miscarriage – especially those of us who have no other children. The loss of a child is devastating in its own right; it also reminds us of the uncertainty about our life's direction. We wonder now if we will ever have children. If our wives take a positive pregnancy test in the future, we know that celebration may be subdued by uncertainty that claws at our joy.

While we can't expect clarity, we aren't left alone. In the silence of prayer and adoration, in conversations with those close to us, we allow God to guide us to holiness and show us the way. We pray for a faith like St. Joseph – the ability to say “yes” as challenges appear, and the grace to respond wholeheartedly to God's call.

St. Joseph's righteousness and faithfulness make him [an example for men in all stages of life](#). After he decided to quietly divorce Mary upon her pregnancy, the angel visited Joseph in a dream and held him to keep her as his wife. We read nothing of hesitation or argument after this encounter. St. Joseph simply remained silent and placed his trust in God.

Fathers who have lost children in utero often appear as a silent witness. As we struggle with our own emotions, those close to us often ask, “How's your wife doing?” before checking in with us – if at all. Although it is not easy, in a way, this is how it should be. Our wives carry the physical reality of miscarriages in a way that we do not, and they bear a unique sadness that their husbands must help carry. Just as Joseph always sought out what was best for Mary, we're called to serve our wives. Through our marriage vows, we're called to be like Christ for the Church – sacrificial even to the point of laying down our lives.

Serving our wives requires strength drawn from our marriage itself, as well as other important relationships in our lives – most importantly, our relationship with God. This is

especially true in the grace he gives us, which bears fruit in us when we are properly disposed to receive it.

We need to strengthen and fortify ourselves so that we can support our wives through the mourning process. Yes, we're called to mourn for our wives, but even more, we're called to mourn with our wives. Each of us has our own wounds, needs and deep sadness; each of us is deserving of love and support even as we empty ourselves out for those we love. We must take the initiative to seek out spiritual guidance, therapy, and other mental and spiritual health resources. Our vulnerability is not weakness; it is a part of our human nature. We can better serve our wives and the Lord if we have the courage to seek the help that we need.

St. Joseph, friend and guide

Reflecting on the [fatherhood](#) of St. Joseph and his closeness to Jesus stirs a desire to move closer to Him, too. This has been disconcerting as I consider my own fatherhood, and those tender moments I won't have with my child.

But in turning to St. Joseph, we can share in those moments of fatherhood, too. And we must pray to him so that, above all, we imitate his ability to follow whatever God prepares for our future.

The most difficult prayer in our case is that of thanksgiving: for the blessing of fatherhood, no matter how brief, and to forever treasure the moments of joy we felt in welcoming this brief new life before tragedy struck.

By caring for his family, St. Joseph was inherently loving God at the same time. For St. Joseph, love of God and love of his family were not separate. And so, our path isn't all that different. Our vocations are impossible if we don't love God more than we love anyone or anything else in our lives.

Men and women enduring the loss of a child won't be satisfied

with vague platitudes about “God’s plan” or calls to “be not afraid” that often feel dismissive of how we are feeling. When praying a novena to St. Joseph, I’ve felt frustration at the line, “no one ever had recourse to your protection or asked for your aid without obtaining relief.” For couples struggling with infertility, miscarriage or a combination of the two, it’s natural for us to doubt these words after praying for the specific intention for a child to no avail. For those of us who discerned a vocation to religious life and instead felt called to be husbands and fathers, it can be tempting to feel abandoned as we pray next to an empty bedroom or wipe the tears from the cheeks of our mourning wives.

The plans for which we pray and the plans God has for us will not always match up. We can transform our prayer, with God’s help, toward asking him to show us the way forward, and to give us the strength to embrace whatever lies ahead.

We can’t expect that St. Joseph felt perfect peace and clarity through every moment of his fatherhood. The demands placed on him to protect Christ’s earthly life were accepted dutifully, but that doesn’t mean that they were easy.

We must understand that peace in our hearts won’t come through earthly desires – even the most noble and faithful ones. St. Joseph understood what true peace entailed: He laid the Prince of Peace in a manger in Bethlehem.

Someone once counseled me that the struggle to have children would be the cross that defined my marriage and life. It was a reminder that our call to take up our cross and follow Christ is not a metaphor. Crosses are heavy; the road to carry them is long and full of blood, sweat and tears.

In carrying his own cross, St. Joseph prepared Jesus to carry his; and with it, the weight of all of our sins.

May we seek the Lord in the same way that St. Joseph did: with humility, trust and true love. Let’s pray for his

accompaniment and that of his beloved wife along this journey.

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