

Going Beyond the Wound

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A Spirituality for Men

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*In glory, honor, and praise of “Abba, Father,”
the God of Jesus Christ*

*“I have been crucified with Christ;
and it is no longer I who live,
but it is Christ who lives in me.”
Gal 2:19-20*

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Foreword

This book, a response to an invitation, also extends one. It comes from a request to speak at the National Religious Vocation Directors' Convention on "Male Spirituality." I was surprised, since I had never spoken about or written on the topic. Always one for a challenge, I put aside my apprehensions, accepted the invitation, and began putting together some ideas on what the Catholic faith offers concerning male spirituality.

As I gathered my thoughts, my mind kept returning to my father's workshop in my childhood home on Jefferson Avenue in Staten Island, New York. This workshop, the only unfinished room in our house, occupied an unassuming corner of our basement. It had a workbench with all the basic carpentry tools: a small power saw for cutting lumber; a cabinet containing oil cans, paints, and varnishes for his work; an unfinished bookcase stacked with back issues of *Popular Mechanics* and a slew of helpful do-it-yourself books; and a desk where my father planned his projects, kept all his paper work and paid the bills. I also remember him tinkering in there, building things with us for our school projects, being the person to turn to when you needed help and had to get something done. He was a "go-to" kind of dad. He was a man's man, and I am grateful he was my father.

Whenever I think of my father this basement workshop comes to mind, for it tells me something about the kind of person he was. A New York City firefighter, he had to spend many long nights away from his wife and family. At times this absence made him seem distant, a perception reinforced by his being the family disciplinarian while my mother was the nurturer and caregiver. Still, my brothers, sister, and I

knew that he loved us very much and wanted only the best for us. He worked hard to provide a good education and give us everything we needed to succeed in life. What he could not buy, he built with his own hands. I have fond memories of watching him saw lumber, mix cement, lay tiles, and build fences to create enough space indoors and outdoors for his growing family. I also remember him at his desk studying for the exams required of him as a firefighter. I remember being especially proud the day he came home and announced that he had been promoted to the rank of Battalion Chief.

In my mind's eye, I often find myself in my father's workshop, either doing my homework at his desk or tinkering with his tools and building things that I hoped would make him proud of me. Even today I spend a lot of time there, that is, in my mind. Now that he's gone, it's my way of feeling close to him. To be honest, much of my life's work has been nothing more than tinkering in my father's workshop. The workbench, tools, bookcase, and desk are different, but the places they occupy in my imagination are very much the same. In this special place, I can plan things, build things, create things—and be a man's man. The chapters that follow emerged from my tinkering in the workshop of my mind, the one rooted in my father's basement workshop. I invite you, my reader, to receive what I offer on Catholic spirituality for men from the unfinished workshop in the basement of my spiritual home. May it help you reach a deeper awareness of the presence of God in your life. May it help you on your journey home.

Dennis J. Billy, C.Ss.R.
March 19, 2017
The Solemnity of St. Joseph

Introduction

Although this book is directed toward men, it has value for anyone wanting to understand his or her spiritual condition. It focuses on male spirituality from within the tradition of the Catholic faith and seeks to draw out the relationship between the two. It acknowledges the many approaches to male spirituality, some highly developed and others implicit or on the periphery of men's awareness. It understands that society often asks men to play certain roles, that many men are conditioned by their society, and that they are apt to change as society itself changes. Some of the most basic insights of the Catholic faith, however, affirm that stable characteristics of the male personality stem from human nature itself, the complementarity of the sexes, and the existential situation of living in a fallen world. As men journey through time and live out their lives, they adapt to changing cultural demands and circumstances yet remain remarkably the same. They remain stable and recognizable amid the various levels of physical, mental, spiritual, and social growth (or regression).

This book rests on the premise that men are created in the image and likeness of God, yet are deeply wounded by humanity's primal fall from grace. These touch every dimension of a man's makeup—the physical, psychological, spiritual, and communal—and affect men in unique ways. These wounds can be healed only by the redemptive love of Christ and the action of his Spirit through the life and ministry of his Body, the Church. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth God entered our world to give himself to us completely and become our nourishment and source of hope. In his passion and death on the cross Jesus embraced our wounds and healed them by the power of his resurrection. By bearing the wounds of his pas-

sion in his glorified flesh, the Risen Christ demonstrates his power over death and reminds us that our wounds—whatever they are and wherever they come from—not only can be healed, but can be transformed by the power of his love. Therefore, Catholic men are called to live in the wounds of the Risen and Glorified Christ. The Apostle Paul, one of the early Church's great men of God, wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:19-20).¹ Like Paul, Catholic men are called to join their wounds with those of the crucified Lord and allow the life of the Risen Christ to penetrate their lives. In this way, their wounds will be healed and their lives transformed.

The book contains five chapters. Chapter 1, "A Catholic Spirituality for Men?" defines basic terms used in the discussion. Chapter 2, "Our Wounded Selves," considers the wounds that all men share by their common humanity. Chapter 3, "The Broken World of Men," examines the wounds specific to men. Chapter 4, "Christ, the Wounded Healer," looks to Christ as the healer of humanity's wounds, with a focus on those unique to the experience of men. Chapter 5, "Living in the Wounds of the Risen Lord," shows how the transfigured wounds of Christ's resurrected life touch men's lives and carry them to the threshold of the divine. Each chapter concludes with a section entitled "Practicing Catholic Male Spirituality" and a "Prayer to Jesus" that might help in the struggle to be saintly men of God open to the promptings of the Spirit in their lives. The epilogue, "A Manifesto for Catholic Male Spirituality," sets forth general principles for Catholic men to follow in their journey of faith.

Although this book does not pretend to offer a comprehensive Catholic spirituality for men, it does identify many key characteristics that they should consider as they strive to fulfill themselves in the faith. It focuses on how Catholic

1 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations come from *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

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men can remain comfortable in their own skins yet be faithful to Christ. It looks to Christ's manhood as a key to their Catholic identity and to the wounds of the Risen Lord as the means through which their own wounds will be healed and transformed. Men must look to him for the courage to face their inner demons and persevere to their journey's end. If nothing else, this book raises Catholic men's awareness of their central role in the Church's vocation, life, mission, and well-being. It challenges men to rise to the challenge of the Catholic faith and asks them to acknowledge their wounds, entrusting them to the Risen and Glorified Lord.