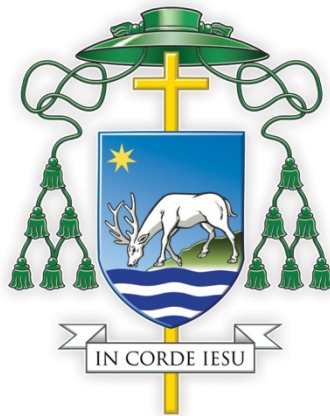


BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan BA, STL, PhD



MESSAGE FROM BISHOP PHILIP to all Fathers of Families in our Diocese on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, 19th March 2016

Dear Christian Dads,

Today, the Feast of St. Joseph, I wish to send to all fathers of families in our diocese a brief message of appreciation and encouragement.

First of all, Happy Feastday! Like you in your family, St. Joseph played a crucial part in the Holy Family of Nazareth, in caring for Jesus, the Son of the Woman he loved so much, especially in all those hidden years of Jesus' home life and upbringing. Just like the care, joy and pride you find in your own children, St. Joseph held the new-born Infant in his arms, guided Him as He learnt to walk, played with Him in His Childhood, and supported Him as a teenager. Although not His biological father, Joseph showed Jesus fatherly love and care. He gave Him an inspiring example of being a man. He taught Him a trade, the value of work, how to earn a living and support a family. He 'socialised' Him into the cultural and religious life of the time. Above all, the self-sacrificing father-son relationship would have run so deep that in this profoundly good man, Jesus would have recognised a beautiful and resplendent icon of His heavenly Father.

Today, fatherhood, along with marriage, is in crisis. To the great distress of everyone involved, 42% of marriages end in divorce. Some say it's OK to live together without being married ('cohabitation'). Yet cohabitation is not a substitute since the average length of couples living together is barely two years! Nearly 50% of all children are born outside marriage and many children live in homes led by a single parent. 92% of single parent households are mothers and over a million children in Britain grow up without contact with their fathers. This is why it's not an exaggeration to say fatherhood is in crisis.

Just as every woman, married, celibate or single, has the natural vocation to become motherly, so too every man, married, celibate or single, is called to become fatherly. Moreover, as Pope Francis has said, every child has a fundamental human right to be brought up by a father as well as a mother. Indeed, every child has the right to grow up in a stable family capable of

creating a good environment for their emotional development. The abandoning of the traditional religious culture of family and marriage - a loving, monogamous, covenantal relationship of one man and one woman with the procreative purpose of raising children – has resulted in a revolution, Pope Francis adds, that has brought “spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.” We need a new human ecology. We need to examine our scale of values to ensure the right balance in our lives. We need, for instance, to take care not to let our work, and the pressures it can bring on our time and energy, disrupt or devastate the most important things of life such as our relationship with God, our home life and our relationship with our wife and children.

This month, Pope Francis is publishing his long-awaited document that sums up the two recent synods of bishops on “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Modern World”. Once released it will be available on-line from the Vatican web-site, and I encourage you to study it carefully. Please pray for all the families of our diocese, and especially for those who are facing difficulties of one kind or another. Please pray too that our society will receive afresh the Good News of Christ about the complementarity of being male and being female, about the vocation to marriage, and about the joy of Christian family life. In today’s culture, a great battle is being fought between two radically different understandings of what it means to be a human being. Are we merely higher animals, biological machines, objects to be manipulated for pleasure, gain, power? Or are we fundamentally different, persons to be respected, creatures with limits, people with a dignity and a vocation?

In this battle, St. Joseph, Defender of Life and Patron of Marriage, is a bright light and a brilliant example. This month of March is dedicated to him. It’s great that his name is now included in each of the four main Eucharistic Prayers at Mass. Why not ask his prayers more often? Why not keep a picture of him in your home? Why not help organise a ‘St. Joseph’s Table’ for the poor or the housebound? Indeed, why not invoke him – “St. Joseph, protect us” – when you travel with your family?

Let me end by thanking you for all you do as fathers of families. You are undertaking a God-given vocation, when setting a good example in your home. Thank you for being a missionary-disciple of Jesus and for loving Him in the Holy Eucharist. Thank you for keeping the Catholic Faith in the midst of today’s complex secular culture.

Happy Holy Week and Easter – through the intercession of St. Joseph, may God bless you!

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

19th March 2016 – The Solemnity of St. Joseph