

'A Call to Courageous Manhood'

Knights of Columbus Grand Knights Meeting

February 28, 2015

Please stand...

The Lord be with you...A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark..." When it was evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and COURAGEUOSLY went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus". The Gospel of the Lord...Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ. Please Sit...

The word Courage appears in the Bible 39 times, mostly in the Old Testament. And most have to do with battles and wars. 'Be strong', 'Have Courage', 'Do not Fear' are the key phrases...However, this reading at the end of Mark's Gospel recounts the incredible courage of Joseph of Arimathea, to ask for the body of Jesus from Pilate.

I tell you this Gospel story because I was asked today to spend some time with you on the topic of "Men's Spirituality". Let me introduce myself. My name is Deacon Kevin Hogan. I have been married to my bride, Adria, for 32 years and we have 2 adult children; Nick who is 29 and is married to Emily; and Chris, who is 23 and just graduated from JMU. My ministry as a Permanent Deacon, assigned to St. Edward the Confessor on Huguenot Road in Chesterfield, is Marriage and Family Life. I am a 3rd Degree Knight and a member of Council #6546, St. Edward the Confessor. I am also a past Chaplain for our council. This topic of Men's Spirituality is right up my alley. (Thank you Kelly Mortensen, for giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts). So, my theme today is "Stepping Up, a Call to Courageous Manhood".

A friend once told me a story of his childhood and recalled a defining moment. Arthur was the only son of Pat and Louise. He had two sisters, Emily and Jillian. One Saturday morning the whole family was going to paint the rental home the family owned. The previous renters had moved out and it was time to make some cosmetic repairs to the place before the next renters moved in. Arthur was 12 years old and it was Saturday morning. Did Arthur want to be there, painting with his Dad? No...he wanted to be doing what every other 12 year old boy was doing that glorious morning, playing with his friends in the neighborhood. So Arthur did what 12 year old boys often do, he faked a stomach ache to his mother Louise, to try and get out of the paint job. Louise went to his father Pat and explained that little Arthur was not feeling well and the smell of the paint would make him feel worse. Besides, he was a 12 year old boy and 12 year old boys need to be out playing with their friends on a Saturday morning. (Mom was always more sympathetic to her only son, Arthur – and Arthur knew that...). Dad said, "Louise, I got this. That boy one day is going to be somebody's husband and somebody's father. There are going to be people depending on him. He has got to learn how to do what he HAS to do and not what he WANTS to do".

A transition took place that day for Arthur. In a very real sense, it was what some would call a 'rite of passage'. His Dad knew that in order for him not to become a fifty year old adolescent, Arthur need to make some intentional steps toward manhood. Arthur recalls this story to me today and says, "I can't tell you how grateful I am to God for the gift of my Dad's courage, and that he wasn't passive when it came to my development".

I told Arthur's story because I want to focus today on the word "Courage". Courage is what his Dad, Pat, exhibited in the story by STEPing Up; Standing firm, Taking initiative, Engaging with wisdom and grace, and Planning and providing. That is what men do and how they STEP UP. You see, I believe that our call is a call to Courageous Manhood. More about STEPPING UP in a moment.

Let's talk about the word "Courage" first. I've always loved stories about courage. My favorites are those about men who executed the impossible on a dangerous battlefield or accomplished great things in athletics, despite obstacles and indescribable hardship – men who did their duty under fire. I believe there's something in the chest of a man that responds in a unique way to stories of courage. There's a piece of every man's heart that longs to be courageous, to be bold and gutsy and etch a masculine mark of bravery on the human landscape. In our hearts, we know that a part of the core of true manhood is courage.

But many men don't realize that although most of us have not fought on a grisly, smoke-filled battlefield, or competed at the highest level of professional athletics; all of us face battles in life that demand courage.

"Courage is doing what you're afraid to do". Real courage is doing your duty under fire. And we all face situations throughout our lives that require that type of courage. Valor at home, protecting our wives and children. Moral courage in the marketplace. Becoming the men God created us to be, despite whatever pressures we face in the world.

So what were some times when you can say you exhibited courage in your life time? (Open it Up)...

I know that my experiences of courage; those times when I was in the valleys of my life, not the mountain tops, I learned some of these lessons:

- In order for a man to be courageous, he must know the truth about who God is. Courage that overcomes fear comes from convictions, and convictions about life and death come from the truth of Scripture.
- The easiest thing for a man to do in a devastating crisis is to move into denial and do nothing.
- Another good man standing next to you will help you be courageous when journeying through that valley.

- It takes repeated acts of courage for a man to truly face and process his emotions. The natural tendency is to run away from them or deny they exist or think you will be less of a man because you sob uncontrollably. Pleasure and pain were both meant to be experienced by men.
- A man is no less courageous if faced with a situation that he can't fix and about which he doesn't know what to do, but cries out to God in prayer, "Help me, God!"
- A man doesn't have to understand God's purposes to be God's man, if he knows who God is and trusts Him. So that is courage.

Now, back to Stepping Up. The "S" in STEP stands for "Standing Firm". Back to my story of 12 year old Arthur...His father Pat stood firm, by keeping him at the task of painting and reminding him of who God meant Arthur to be. "T" stands for Taking the Initiative. Pat took the initiative by not allowing Arthur to slink out of the paint job. He took the initiative, even when Arthur's Mom Louise, was going to allow Arthur to go play, right? "E" stand for Engaging with Wisdom and Grace. Arthur's Dad, Pat, used these words..."he has to learn what he HAS to do, and NOT what he WANTS to do". That is wisdom and grace there...I know if that was me as the Dad, talking to my boys, I would be tempted to use much less wisdom and grace in delivering that message...how about you? "P" stands for Planning and Providing. Back to Arthur's Dad's words..."That boy is someday going to be someone's husband, and someone's Father. There are going to be people depending on him". If that is not planning for the future of a 12 year old, what is?

There are 5 STEPS of Manhood. Think of them as a Man's journey through life. Each stage offers its challenges and opportunities. Let me name them first....The five STEPS are: Boyhood, Adolescence, Manhood, Mentor and Patriarch.

(Get on a step ladder); Boyhood - It's an age of exploration and discovery. For some, boyhood was an idyllic time of innocence and fun when even their worst behavior was more mischief and malice. Sadly, for others boyhood brings plenty of bad memories and few good ones. Either way, boyhood shapes us. As son's move through the stage of boyhood, they need Dad's for protection in a dangerous culture. He needs Dad's training, teaching, and tough love. He needs Dad to lay aside any obstacles or fears and courageously get involved in his life. Truett Cathy, Founder and CEO of Chick – Fil – A, wrote a book, "It's better to build boys than mend men". Enough said...go get it and read it!

And finally...this prayer...it's titled, "A Father's Prayer". "Build me a son, O lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory. Build me a son whose wishbone will not be where his backbone should be; a son who will know Thee – and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge. Lead him I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here, let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fail. Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goal will be high; a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men; one who will learn to laugh,

yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past. And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously. Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. Then, I, his father, will dare to whisper, "I have not lived in vain."... That is General Douglas MacArthur.

(Take the next STEP); Adolescence – The age of 'Pushing' and 'Pulling'. There is a lot of confusion going on inside him. He wants more respect and fewer boundaries, but still reverts back to boyhood. We have lowered our expectations for teenagers. We think he should have all kinds of freedom; expect him to rebel, experiment with risky choices, play games, have sex, and generally get into trouble...We expect him to continue to act like a child! We expect him to step back, not up!

It is a season of transition. As he grows toward manhood, he should begin to understand that real men serve. He should start shifting focus from himself to looking out for the good of others, putting their needs ahead of his wants. Here is the bottom line. The greatest predictor of a child dropping out of High School, committing a crime, and going to prison is a home without a Dad.

(Take the next STEP); Manhood – An Age of Stepping Up Again and Again.

Back to the Bible...1 Corinthians 13:11 "When I was a child ,I used to talk like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I put childish things aside". Many have asked when an adolescent becomes a man. I think the answer lies right there with St. Paul in 1 Corinthians...Words used, ideas and interests, and reaching conclusions and making plans. That's what Paul is talking about here; speak, think and reason.

How do we define manhood? Here is an acronym to consider as an answer to that question...REAL, 'R'ejects passivity, 'E'xpects God's greater reward, 'A'ccepts responsibility, 'L'eads courageously. Here is a biblical definition of manhood as a functional reality, demonstrated in a man's fulfillment of responsibility and leadership. It comes from Dr. Albert Mohler: (1) Spiritual Maturity sufficient to Lead a Wife and Children, (2) Personal maturity sufficient to be a responsible husband and father, (3) Economic maturity sufficient to hold an adult job and handle money, (4) Physical maturity sufficient to work and protect a family, (5) Sexual maturity sufficient to marry and fulfill God's purposes, (6) Moral maturity sufficient to lead as an example of righteousness, (7) Ethical maturity sufficient to make responsible decisions, (8) Worldview maturity sufficient to understand what is really important, (9) Relational maturity sufficient to understand and respect others, (10) Social maturity sufficient to make a contribution to society, (11) Verbal maturity sufficient to Communicate and Articulate as a Man, (12) Character maturity sufficient to demonstrate courage under fire, (13) Biblical maturity sufficient to Lead at some level in the church.

(Take the next STEP); Mentor – An age of Investment and Impact. I think that many of us men face a similar choice as we reach our thirties, forties and fifties. We may never face the intense opposition that confronted people like Jackie Robinson, in breaking Major League Baseballs 'color barrier', but I believe we are called to look beyond ourselves to the impact we can have on the next generation. A mentor

must pass on his values; lessons learned from his mistakes, successes, and defeats; the essence of his life. He intentionally passes on wisdom to the next generation and casts a vision for how they can do the same.

The Bible gives us a model for mentoring. St. Paul again, at the end of his life, had a mentoring relationship with Timothy. He challenged Timothy with a compelling vision..."You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:1-2)

There are 3 qualities that describe how a mentor can maximize his influence. (1) A Mentor is Available, (2) A Mentor is Purposeful, and (3) A Mentor is Authentic.

Every man needs a mentor. Every man needs to be a mentor. I think the greatest impact of a man's life is between ages 50 and 75. Your life is not over when you get the AARP card boys...As a mentor, you can make a difference in another man's life that can change his whole world. As someone once said, "To the world, you may just be somebody. But to somebody, you may just be the world."

(Take the last STEP); Patriarch – An age of Influence and Relevance. Stepping up and becoming a patriarch may be the most courageous step a man ever makes. It demands grit and character to go against the grain of a youth oriented society. A man who doesn't step up at this point in life will most assuredly step down. True patriarchs are such a rare and endangered species that most men don't know this step exists. Others wrongly assume that they could never stand on this step; they don't see themselves ever becoming a patriarch. As a result, we have a generation of men entering this last season of their lives feeling aimless, useless, and bewildered, instead of being on the cutting edge of what could be their most productive and fruitful years.

Here are some qualities of a Patriarch. (1) A Generational Connector; He and his wife are crucial to keeping their families together; (2) A Generational Influencer; A courageous patriarch helps plant the seeds that others harvest. He delights in making an investment in a time beyond the horizon. Investing in another generation; (3) A Generational Intercessor; prayer as intercessory investments. Prayer can be your biggest contribution. You have the wisdom of a lifetime to knowing what your children need in their marriages, in raising their children, and in their careers. It is far more effective for you to talk to God about them than to talk to them about God!

The scriptures describe life as a race. In Hebrews 12:1-3 says, "Let us run with endurance that the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." God created Men not to rust out but to wear out as they stretch out toward the finish line. (Get off ladder)

Men today are realizing that another crisis is upon us. There are no bullets or bombs, but we are on a battlefield all the same. It's a fight for our families and our future. And for this fight we need men who are willing to bravely step up and be the tough, courageous men God has designed us to be.

Winston Churchill is often quoted as saying, "There comes a time into the life of every man a task for which he, and he alone, is uniquely suited. What a shame if that moment finds him either unwilling or unprepared for that which would become his finest hour." Every man has a task for which he is uniquely suited. You may have already discovered this – or you may be yearning for purpose or direction. Whether you are a young man or are nearing the end of your life, my charge to you is this: press into the battle, fill your lungs with smoke from the front lines, and finish strong. Be prepared to shine when presented with your finest hour.

So, what do you do now? I suggest you start here. Knowing God personally...If you want to take the ultimate step up and experience life the way God designed it, then you need a relationship with Him.

Know this Men...this will take more courage than anything else I have talked about today. If you want to live as the man God intended you to be, then you need to know the God who created you. God's word clearly tells us that we cannot close the gap between ourselves and God on our own: "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). God is holy, and we are sinful. Our sin separates us from God. We need a Savior.

Here is the invite from God...Thankfully, God has provided the way to solve our dilemma. He became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a holy life in perfect obedience to God and willingly died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Then He proved that He is more powerful than sin or death by rising from the dead. Jesus said to Thomas, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.' (John 14:6). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus have provided the way to establish a relationship between you and God.

Here is the hard part, it takes courage...we need to accept God's invitation, like an RSVP! It's not enough to intellectually acknowledge that Christ is the Son of God. As an act of the will, we must place our faith and trust in Him and surrender our lives to Him and His plan for us. When we accept the incredible gift God offers us, we become His children "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

Your Challenge, if you choose to courageously accept it, is to create your own 'Step Up Plan'. It's an Action Plan for taking your next step - the one thing you need to do to keep "stepping up to manhood". Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you what that one thing is today. Identifying that 'one thing' is a process...Come see me, we can talk...

Some questions for all of us...Are things right between you and God? Is He the center of your life? Can you turn to Christ, surrender your life to Him, and begin the adventure of allowing Jesus Christ and the Scriptures to transform your life. All you need to do is talk to Him in faith and tell Him what is stirring in your mind and heart. Prayer may be new to you, but understand that God knows your heart and is not as concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. Try this...

“Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of Man You want me to be.” Amen

This is your challenge and mine men. There is something in our lives today we need to Step Up to with Courage. Only you and I know what that is. In closing, let’s go back to that Prayer of St. Joseph and look for all those words of courage. These words can inspire us to a life of courage and try to emulate one of our heroes in our Catholic Faith, St. Joseph...

(This presentation was adapted from Dennis Rainey’s Book, “Stepping Up, A Call To Courageous Manhood”; and the “Stepping Up” workbook for the video series.)