

Thanks, Dad, for Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Not long ago, I was sorting through some of my Dad's old papers and I came across a candy wrapper and a Father's Day card tucked into an envelope that bore a March 2001 postmark from Rome. As soon as I saw it, it brought back happy memories of a sabbatical I spent living and working in Rome for several spring months.

One of the highlights of my stay was the chance to celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph Italian style. I have long thought that this strong, silent hero of the New Testament gets far less attention than he deserves. So, I was more than happy to take advantage of the chance to celebrate him.

First, of course, I honored him by indulging in (more than one) of the zeppole di San Giuseppe – a pastry made in his honor. I do not know the history of this sweet tradition, but that did not prevent me from following it with enthusiastic respect.

Second, I celebrated at a lively street festival. Although I lived in the shadows of St. Peter's Basilica, my local parish was dedicated to St. Joseph. Thus, our festival was particularly exuberant. Talented chalk artists sketched beautiful portraits of St. Joseph in the middle of the closed street and crowded sidewalk. A traditional procession of a floral wrapped statue wended its way through the crowd, and the sound of hymns – and other joyful noises -- filled the evening air. In the windows of bakeries and bars were signs advertising – what else? – zeppole. Falling, as it does, in the heart of Lent, the Feast of St. Joseph was the justification for a very welcome high-spirited celebration.

Third, however, and most personal to me, was the fact that St. Joseph's Day is also the day when Italians celebrate Father's Day. That explained why I sent my Dad a Father's Day card in March – along with some Italian chocolate I knew he would like. The fact that he had saved the card and the evidence of the long-gone chocolate warmed my heart and made me glad I had braved a crowded Roman post office to send it to him.

I like the link between rejoicing in St. Joseph's Day and celebrating Father's Day. Sometimes I think that, like St. Joseph, good fathers also get far less attention than they deserve. Fathers who are careless, absent, or worse, get attention while those who live their vocation well are often, like St. Joseph, not noticed quite as much.

So, perhaps, when March 19th comes around, the Feast of St. Joseph may be an occasion to be prayerfully grateful for loving dads if we are, or once were, blessed to have them journey with us through life.

St. Joseph was asked to undertake a challenge he did not fully comprehend. Thanks to all those dads who face difficult challenges they do not understand and bear their struggles with strength, trust, and patient endurance.

St. Joseph housed his family in a stable when that was the best he could find. Thanks to all those struggling dads who ache to give their families more in material comfort while they give them the shelter of great love.

St. Joseph practiced his faith through his life of prayer and by following religious traditions with fidelity. Thanks to all those dads who, through their example, give their children the precious bequest of faith.

St. Joseph spoke not a single word recorded in Scripture. Thanks to all those dads who work in quiet ways, not calling attention to themselves but putting the good of their families ahead of their own needs and wants.

St. Joseph was a carpenter and made his living with the manual labor that was his art and his trade. Thanks to all those dads who work long hard hours in labor, art or trade to support their families, contribute to their communities, and glorify God through their work.

St. Joseph searched for Jesus when, as a boy, Jesus stayed behind in a temple in Jerusalem after a family pilgrimage. Thanks to all those dads who seek for their own children when they are lost in so many different and heartbreaking ways.

St. Joseph cared for his beloved during the months of her unexpected pregnancy. Thanks to all those dads who care for the mothers of their children as they carry their infants within them, especially when the circumstances are most difficult.

St. Joseph loved and honored Mary. Thanks to all those dads who give their children a priceless gift when they love and honor their mother.

My own Dad has finished his journey through this life. So, on March 19th, I cannot send him a card or candy as I once did. But now, like then, I can still offer him my thanks on St. Joseph's Day. And, in a particular way, I am thankful that my Dad saved an old card and a candy wrapper. It reminded me to be grateful for the quiet way he walked with me through ordinary times.

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