

MASCULINITY

Opening Prayer

St. Augustine's Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

Begin with a few moments of silent recollection.

Understanding the Breach

1) Authentic masculinity pursues virtue. The strength of a man's character is dependent upon the virtues he has acquired. A man has the respect of others when they perceive strength in him.

- *Who is a man that you respect and why?*
- *What characteristics or virtues (such as courage, honesty and loyalty) define a "great" man? Describe a few men from history, from contemporary culture or from your own life who exemplify these virtues.*
- *The episode also says that to be masculine is to embrace responsibility. How is embracing responsibility related to living for excellence? What are specific ways many men in today's culture fail to embrace responsibility?*

2) Matthew James Christoff says that we are facing a “man crisis” today in the Catholic Church. Many people also talk about a crisis concerning masculinity in the larger society.

- *Consider this “man crisis” in light of something Dr. Tim Gray says: “A man is defined by the ability to act.” How has this crisis affected your own life or the lives of individuals or families you know? How does this crisis manifest itself in popular culture?*
- *What are some obstacles in our modern culture that make it difficult for boys to know they have become men?*
- *Can you recall an event or experience where it was evident to you that you had become a man?*

3) Father Burke Masters says that the difference between men and boys is that boys are concerned about themselves, while men are concerned about others.

- *Boys become men in the company of men. Can you think of some examples from your own life where this is the case?*
- *What are specific examples of putting others before self that you have experienced or witnessed in your own life? What is hardest about this sacrificial leadership?*
- *Virtue is like a muscle. It can become stronger or grow weak. What concrete steps can men take to develop and strengthen these virtues?*

4) Mike Phelan discusses how meeting his future wife helped him develop direction in life, a stronger faith and a better understanding of what it means to be a man.

- *What relationships in your own life have helped you understand what it means to be a man, or challenged you to become a better man? What relationships have drawn you away from authentic masculinity?*
- *Who are some men in your life whom you could ask for guidance on how to become a better man of God?*
- *What role can men play in helping other men we know—our sons, our brothers, our friends, our coworkers—grow in their understanding of true manhood?*

5) The episode discusses how the challenge of living as a man of God can be intimidating for men who feel unqualified or unprepared for the task. Mike Phelan, however, says they “were made for this fight.”

- *Why might a man feel unqualified or unprepared to fully embrace authentically masculine roles, particularly those of husband and father?*
- *In life, have you ever experienced a moment where you thought, “I’m in over my head here”? How did you get from there to “I’ve got this”?*
- *What tools are available to help men better prepare to grow in their faith and fulfill their roles as men, Catholics, husbands, fathers and leaders?*

Bricks for the Breach

“I love St. Joseph. His model speaks volumes because he doesn’t say anything. I would much rather watch a man and see his actions because that’s going to tell me who he is. And he was the one who trained the Savior in living, in being a man.” (Dave DiNuzzo)

“Christian masculinity is always going to take as its most basic point of reference the mystery of Jesus Christ who gave himself unto death. He’s making that gift as the perfect man, but he’s also making that gift to the Church. He’s also showing us what it means to be father, a husband, and he’s showing us the kind of the love that God has for us—a love that seeks communion, a love that seeks and serves the good of the other in a fruitful union.” (Dr. Nicholas Healy)

“Authentic masculinity is found in fatherhood. Fatherhood is the end of masculinity. And so within that context, then, masculine love takes the form of being a protector, being a provider.” (Father Sean Kilcawley)

“Herein lies the fullness of masculinity; each Catholic man must be prepared to give himself completely, to charge into the breach, to engage in spiritual combat, to defend women, children, and others against the wickedness and snares of the devil!” (Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men)

“We have to attack Satan. We don’t sit back and just try to ward him off, but we go forward with our faith. We put on the armor of God, and every single day try to slay that dragon.” (Matt Birk)

“Will the Lord not continue to inspire men? Of course He will, and He continues to do so! Our concern is not if the Lord will give us the required strength, but how He is doing so right now. How is His Spirit moving us to rise up and reject passivity in a culture of fatherlessness?”

How is He now giving us interior strength in a culture of pornography? How is He now inspiring us to look beyond ourselves and our technology to the peripheries where Christ is needed? How is the Lord inspiring you and me, right now, to cast aside concerns for our own comfort, to serve our fellow man, to put out into the deep, to step into the breach?" (Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men)

Sword of the Spirit

Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this concerns all humankind; because God will bring to judgment every work, with all its hidden qualities, whether good or bad. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

[Jesus said:] "Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here immediately and take your place at table'? Would he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished'? Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'" (Luke 17:7-10)

"Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground." (Ephesians 6:13)

Call to Battle

Fast one day a week for a month. St. Paul writes, "Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear

that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). Exercising self-control over the body builds self-control over the will, and therefore resistance to bad habits and temptations.

Read about the life of one of the saints who exemplified manliness.

St. Joseph, St. George, St. Thomas More, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Isaac Jogues, St. Maximilian Kolbe and Pope St. John Paul II come to mind, but there are many others. Identify how this saint exhibited manliness and write down specific, concrete resolutions on how you can emulate him. Biographies can be found online or purchased at Catholic bookstores—some parishes even have libraries where you can borrow religious books.

Imitate Christ. Jesus Christ shows us the fullness of what it means to be a man. Pick one of the Gospels and read a short portion, at least a few verses, each day. Meditate on these passages to discover the ways in which Christ exhibits true manliness and better understand how to true be a man.

Closing Prayer

Request intentions from the group and conclude with the Prayer to St. Michael.

Prayer to St. Michael

*St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God,
cast into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.*

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