

What St Louis Martin Teaches Fathers

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There has been a lot of talk in recent months about ‘masculinity’. The head of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, caused a stir by saying that we need a return of ‘masculine energy’. The vice-president of the USA, JD Vance, continued that theme by complaining that men are marginalised in our society.

But for Christians, it should be noted how he continued his comments. When he described what it means to be ‘masculine’, he talked about telling off-colour jokes, drinking beer and being competitive.

We would struggle to find a depiction of masculinity further from what the Church imagines. Instead of drunkenness and aggression, when Christians think about what it means to be a mature man they think more of people like St Louis Martin.

Martin was a Frenchman who lived in the 1800s. He is best known as the father of St Thérèse of Lisieux. He was not a business tycoon or a celebrated soldier. He was a watchmaker. He was a devoted husband. He was an attentive father. And he quietly shaped a life in his home that gave rise to holiness. His story reminds us that true masculinity is something expressed in the ordinariness of life.

Although he harboured hopes of becoming a monk in his youth, life

went a different direction for Louis, and he ended up marrying Zélie Guérin, a lace-maker. Together they built a home filled with faith, love and discipline.

Their marriage was a true partnership, centred on their shared Catholic faith.

Louis was the kind of father who nurtured his children’s souls. He prayed with them, took them on long nature walks and instilled in them a sense of wonder for God’s creation. He was not controlling or demanding, but he led by example – living a life of integrity and trust in God. His gentle presence helped shape Thérèse into the saint we know today.

Their life was not always easy. They lost four of their nine children in infancy. And then Zélie died of breast cancer, and he became the single dad to five daughters. Despite his grief, he remained steadfast, guiding his children with patience and devotion. When Thérèse, his youngest, expressed her desire to become a Carmelite nun at the unusually young age of fifteen, Louis supported her unreservedly, trusting that God was at work in her life.

In his later years, sickness took away his strength, but it did not rob him of his dignity. He remained steadfast in his commitment to personal humility, to loving those around him and to trusting in God.



Louis Martin and Marie-Zélie Guérin

While you don't have to be a father to embody healthy masculinity (remember, of course, that Jesus himself was never married!), this Father's Day is a chance to reflect on how fatherhood is one vocation available to us. Like priesthood or religious life, fatherhood is a calling and can be a path to holiness. Louis embraced it fully, not as a duty but as a gift. Fathers today can draw from his example, seeing their role not just as providers but as spiritual guides for their children.

Louis didn't make grand speeches or impose his will on his children. Instead he loved them through simple gestures: morning prayers, words of encouragement and quiet sacrifices. Modern dads can take heart – what matters most isn't perfection but presence.

Louis left his daughters no vast

fortune, but he gave them something greater: a deep-rooted trust in God. The greatest gift we can offer is a faith that lasts. On Father's Day, we honour the fathers who, like St Louis Martin, live out their vocation not through spectacle but through steady, faithful love. Whether by reading bedtime stories, offering silent prayers or simply being present, these fathers shape their children's lives in ways they may never fully realise.

This may not be an expression of masculinity that the likes of Zuckerberg endorse, but it makes a much more positive contribution to the world than merely accumulating wealth! If you are a father, take heart. Your love, even in its quietest moments, matters more than you know. And if you have been blessed by such a father, take a moment today to give thanks.