



AUTHENTIC MASCULINITY

Fr. Burke Masters

Hello, men. As we said, my name is Father, Burke Masters. I'm the director of adult formation for the Diocese of Juliet in Illinois. And it's a joy to be with you here today. The topic I'm going to be speaking about is authentic masculinity. And I believe that we were made for a time like this. If you read the news, you know, or open a newspaper, you see all the negative news and may think gosh, what is going on in the world? And I believe that a lot of the problems that we're facing can be traced back to a lack of authentic masculinity in our country. And so what I'd like to talk about today are five things. We're going to talk about the stages of manhood and then five things that will help us move through those stages. So as I go through the stages of manhood, I want you to think about where am I in these stages? So the five stages I'm going to be talking about are Boyhood, Adolescence, Manhood, being a Mentor, and a Patriarch. And so I'm going to define each one. But what I mean again, think about where am I in these stages? So the first stage is Boyhood and I want you to think about, you know, not only chronologically, you know, growing in age, but also spiritually and affectively, how am I growing?

So what defines a boy? I remember when I was vocations director for our diocese. We sent our college seminarians to Saint John Vianney College Seminary in Minnesota. And their motto was "This is where boys become men." They say, boys think about themselves and men think about others. And so that's kind of where this progression is going. And obviously, we want to go from being boys to ultimately being Patriarchs. So boys, think about themselves. Generally, they're totally dependent on their parents. And so they can't do a lot on their own. They can often be irresponsible. They can be impulsive, you know, do things without thinking about them and very self-centered as I said. As boys. This is where Universe revolves around. So

that's what the first stage of manhood is, it's Boyhood.

The second stage is adolescence. So you might think about chronologically speaking this would be in our teenage years and what kind of characterizes a teenager or what characterizes a teenager or an adolescent in the spiritual life? A lot of the same things of Boyhood, but now it's much more vocalized. So teenagers generally have conflicts with their parents, right? They start to rebel against the authorities. They start to desire Independence and rebel against any kind of rules that the authorities or the parents will give them. They refuse to take responsibility for anything. You know, they'll blame it on someone else. And again, very self-centered. So it's much like being a boy, but it's much more outward. It's much more spoken.

The third stage is Manhood. And of course, this is one of our goals, but it's not the end goal, as we're going to talk about. So what kind of characterizes men? Men start to think about others. They start to crucify their self-centeredness. If you think about, you know, Saint Peter, he went from being, you know, self-focused. He was a fisherman and it was all about him. And then when he encountered the person of Jesus Christ, Jesus kind of drew out of him this growth in his identity as a man, and he started to give his life away much like all of the disciples that follow Jesus. So think about your own life. Am I focused on myself? Am I focused on what I want to get out of this world? Or am I focused on what I can do for others? We know and Ephesians 5, it says, "husband's love your wives." How? Like Christ loved the church, and how did Christ love the church? He gave his life for her. And so, that's one of the characteristics of a man, is that he's willing to give his very life for others.

My favorite scripture in the whole Bible is John 15:13. So, when I used to play baseball I played at

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Mississippi State University, where last year, they won the College World Series which was fun. I got to be a part of that. And they treat their ball players like professionals there. And so, whenever I would sign an autograph, I would always put John 15:13, which is “there’s no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend.” And so whether you’re a husband and father, whether you’re single, whether you’re a priest, being a man means that I’m called to lay down my life for others. And, within that, in manhood, we welcome accountability. You know, so boys and adolescents, you know point the blame at someone else much like Adam and Eve, you know, when God said to Adam what happened? He said she made me do it and then Eve said the serpent made me do it. But a man will take responsibility for his actions. Say I did it, accept the consequences, learn from that mistake and keep going. You know, King David was a good example of that. Where He made a horrible mistake. He was a man of God, you know, he committed adultery with Bathsheba ended up having her husband killed on the battlefield, but we hear in the Psalms, how he repented from his sin. He asked God for mercy. God gave him mercy, and he was able to get back into the Graces of God.

So as I talk about this, I want us to realize that we’re never beyond the grace and mercy of God. If there’s something in your history where you’re not proud of and you say, you might believe the lie that God can never forgive me of this. It’s a lie. And we need to renounce that lie. We could say something like “in the name of Jesus Christ. I renounce the lie that God can’t forgive me”, or “in the name of Jesus Christ. I renounce the lie that I’m beyond the mercy of God.” And so we take responsibility for our actions and we are held accountable for our actions. I encourage men to have at least one other man in their lives where they can be totally transparent. And to say, you know, I’m really struggling with X Y, or Z and to have that man who will not judge you, but will walk that Journey with you and to say, okay, let’s get through this together. I, personally, have a few men that every day I check in with on certain things in my life that I’m working on and they hold me accountable and vice versa. They check in with me with what they’re working on and I found when you have somebody who’s encouraging you and holding you accountable, That’s where growth happens. And men, real men, are able to take that feedback and to say, you know, you’re right. I honestly don’t like

to get called out, but I know it’s because they love me and they want what’s best for me that I’d say, you know, I need to take that to prayer and I usually they’re usually, right? And I usually need to make some changes in my life.

So those are the characteristics of men. The fourth stage we have Boyhood, Adolescence, we have Men and then we have the Mentor. So now men, you know, are working on their own lives, trying to be able to give their lives away. Now, a mentor is someone who is then going to take what they’ve learned and walk with other men. This is what Jesus did with his 12. He didn’t just want to make them good men. But he was teaching them how to do what he did with them with other people. And so he poured his life Jesus did into these 12 men so that they can then go out and change the world. And starting with those 12 men 2000 years ago, here’s 1.2 billion Catholics in the world today plus another billion Christians of different denominations. And so his methodology works, and so mentors. Give a good example. They know that others are watching their example, and they want to, they want to follow a mentor. Mentors are generous with their time. They desire to live a life of Grace. They desire to live a life of Holiness. They frequent the sacraments. We’re going to talk about that, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. They’re men of prayer and they’re men who get into the scripture.

Mentors also live lives of humility, where they realize that life is not about them, but it’s about pouring their lives into others. And they know that they are beloved sons of God and they consciously, that’s an important word here, mentors consciously teach others how to do, what they’ve learned to do themselves. So that’s what it means to be in that fourth stage, to be a mentor.

And then the last stage which is the goal of all of us where I think we’re really lacking in our culture and in our world is a Patriarch. So what is a Patriarch? It’s all of the above of men and mentors but they are thinking long past this generation. They know what they do in this generation, today, is going to have an eternal impact on the lives of the Next Generation and down the line. They breathe life into other people and they’re thinking not just of now, but they’re thinking hundreds, and maybe even thousands of years into the future. If you think about that, if we had more Patriarchs in this world today,

who are thinking, how am I going to pass on the faith? Not only to my children, but two generations down the line. How different this world would be today.

So, if we think about those, those five stages of manhood, you know, think about what is held up in our society today. Now, you know, I'm the chaplain for the Chicago Cubs and I have the opportunity to work with major league baseball players. Most of these guys are put on pedestals, not because they're, you know, maybe working through these stages of manhood, but because they have a lot of things. They're good at playing baseball, have a lot of money and we put them on a pedestal and idolize them. But as Saint Thomas Aquinas says

There's four substitutes for God in this world: honor, power, pleasure and wealth. And we see in our culture. We hold those things up and we say that's what it means to be a man. Somebody who has a lot of toys, somebody who's a ladie's man, somebody who, you know, he gets a lot of honor but that doesn't have anything to do with these five stages of manhood. I know men who are put on a pedestal by our culture who are still a boy in these five stages of being a man.

So, let us not characterize what it means to be an authentic man, today, by what the world says, but let's look at it by what God says. And one of the examples I'll be using today, of course, is Jesus Christ, who is the word made flesh. Who showed us what it means to be a human being, to be a man. We're going to talk a little bit about Saint Joseph, who is, you know, this great role model that we just finished the year of St. Joseph, and I'm always reminded of what St. Irenaeus said. He said, "the glory of God is the human being fully alive." And I remember when I was younger, when I was probably in this Boyhood stage or Adolescence, you know, I was doing a lot of things that were self-focused, you know, I wanted to be a major league ballplayer after my playing career was done. I wanted to be a general manager of a Major League team and it was all about the things. You know, I thought I wanted power. I wanted honor. I wanted pleasure. I wanted wealth. I wanted all four substitutes for God and I was not happy. I was experiencing a lot of those things, but I was so unhappy. It wasn't until I gave my life to Christ and started following his will that I started to become alive and my parents saw it in the

people around me saw it.

So let's talk about 5 things that we can do then to move from, you know, let's say we're in the Boyhood stage or Adolescence or maybe we're already Men, but now we want to be mentors and eventually Patriarchs. Five things that we can do to move along in these stages. The first one is that an authentic man knows his identity. This is a game changer. I would say, I went to Seminary when I was 30 years old, and I didn't know who I was, truly. It wasn't until I went on a retreat at IPF—The Institute for Priestly Formation where my spiritual director at an eight-day retreat, he said he wanted all of us to pray with the baptism of the Lord. And he said, you know, I want you to go into the Jordan River with Jesus, come face-to-face with John the Baptist and I want you to hear the words from God, the Father, that he spoke to Jesus. I want you to hear the words spoken to you and what did God the Father say to Jesus when he was baptized by John? He said my beloved Son in whom I delight. And so I remember going to prayer with that and you know, I just in my imagination using Saint Ignatius' style of prayer. I remember walking into the River Jordan with Jesus and, you know, John pouring the water over my head and hearing the voice of the Father as the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a Dove saying "Burke, you are my beloved son in whom I delight" and I couldn't accept it. I couldn't believe it because I believed the lie that I was beyond the reach of God. I believed that God loved everybody else, except me. And I go back to my spiritual director. He said, good keep going. Keep going. Keep doing the same thing. Honestly, guys, it took me five full days, 20 hours of prayer, because we were praying four dedicated hours of prayer each day that I finally opened the My heart a little bit to that truth. That God loved me as his beloved Son and that changed my life. Because when, when, when I ask a man, who are you? What will most men say? They'll say, I'm a doctor. I'm a teacher. I'm a lawyer. We go to what we do. And the danger of that is, what we do changes, especially at retirement. Now again, working with major league baseball players or seeing professional athletes, you see it when they retire.

Many of them go into a deep depression because they don't know who they are. They've identified themselves as a professional athlete, and many of them start to fall into drugs, alcohol, womanizing

because they're trying to find their identity. The beauty is that our identity as beloved sons never changes. And so, I want you to take time maybe this week to pray with the baptism of the Lord, and imagine God. Father saying to you "You are my beloved Son in whom I Delight" that God delights in you and that is your true identity as his beloved Son. And I want you for homework to go home. If you don't already know it, find your baptismal certificate and mark the date of your baptism on your calendar, and celebrate it as much or more than your own birthday. Why? Because that date of your baptism was a life-changing day. I was 18 when I was baptized. And so I remember my baptism very well. I'm fortunate in that respect. Most of you are probably baptized as infants and you don't remember it, but to celebrate that day as the day that the Divine Life entered your heart.

So how do we move along through these stages? The first thing is to know your identity. The second thing is we need to be men of prayer and there's three things I want to emphasize here under being men of prayer: Of course, prayer - spending quiet time in prayer with God. If you can do adoration, that's the best way. The sacraments, Eucharist and Reconciliation, and getting into the scriptures. And so, you can combine two of these with Lectio Divina, you know, which is praying with the scriptures. When I try to teach people how to pray. One of the common responses is "I can't hear God's voice" and that's the beauty of the scripture and what we do with Lectio Divina. We read the scripture and we pay attention to what jumps off the page because the scripture is the word of God and Jesus is the word of God made flesh. When we read scripture God is speaking to you at that point. And so that's why we need to be men in the word of God. I know maybe some of you were raised to say, you know, the word the scriptures are meant for the priest to read and to interpret and I was supposed to leave it on my coffee table. Not anymore guys. We want to get into the word and I would recommend starting in two ways, either reading the scriptures of the day for Mass or starting with one of the gospels. You know, and that's what Sister Margaret did in my life. She said, I want you to start reading the gospel of Matthew. I was 14 years old, a freshman in high school. I didn't know where the gospel of Matthew was, but as I started to read the scriptures.

My heart started to find the answer to everything it was searching for, you know, st. Augustine said "our hearts are restless until they rest in thee," and I was doing well in baseball. I was doing well in school. I had a lot of friends, but my heart was empty until I met Jesus Christ through the scriptures. And so, as a fourteen-year-old, that was one of my first encounters with the Lord in scripture. And so we need to set aside time daily, guys to be in silence, like I say if the local church has adoration carve out time to go there. We carve out time for things that are important. Right? I know guys that will get up at 4:00 to go golfing, 4:00 in the morning, but they can't make a noon Mass right down the street and that means that we're not prioritizing things. Well, there's a sin called acedia, A-C-E-D-I-A,, which is really what sloth is and it doesn't mean just laziness. It means laziness in the spiritual life in the sense that I am not prioritizing things in my life. Well, I'm not putting God at the center of my life. And if we don't put God at the center, that means we're going to be idolizing something and anybody in Scripture that has idols the consequences aren't usually good. And so authentic men put God at the center. And so they spend time in prayer, scripture and the sacraments.

Speaking of Mass speak about mass for a second. If we really knew what was happening at Mass, that bread and wine is becoming the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. There would should be people hanging from the rafters at every Mass, every day of the week. I can tell you, I went on a Cursillo weekend when I was 27 years old. I was a single man and that Cursillo I really encountered, the person of Jesus in a powerful way, started to go to daily Mass. And this woman, after a week of daily Mass, She came up to me and she said, Burke be careful. I said, what do you mean? And she said, that's how my son started. I said, what do you mean? And she said, well, he's a priest today. And so she was speaking to the power of hearing the word of God every day and receiving the Eucharist. Everybody I know that has started to go to daily mass, it's transformed their lives. And so, again, can you make that a priority? Is there something in your life that you can change or reprioritize to make Mass at least once more a week, other than Sunday. You can go every day. That would be awesome! And then reconciliation, I know here at this conference. It's a big encouragement to have men go to confession. I want to encourage that as well. It took me honestly nine years after my

baptism to go to confession and I'm not proud of that. Because what does the Church say? We should go to confession at least once a year, but are we minimalists? You know, we should not be. I always, I always ask men who are married, I say are you a minimalist in your marriage? Do you say to your wife? What's the least I need to do to keep you happy. We would never say that but sometimes we live out, we live that out. Don't we? And so in our spiritual lives? We cannot be. And so I recommend confession at least once a month and more often, obviously, if you have serious sin. It'll be a game changer.

So we have real men know their identity, real men are men of prayer and then a number three, the authentic man seeks for and does the will of God. Jesus Christ himself was the son of God. And yet we hear in Scripture that he went off and prayed and, you know, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, father, let this cup of suffering pass, but not my will, but yours be done. So even Jesus was constantly seeking and doing the will of the Father, the Blessed Mother at the Annunciation, you know, the angel Gabriel appears to her and says, you're going to conceive and bear the Son of God and she said, let it be done to me according to your will. I never wanted to be a priest. Honestly, I wanted to be, remember, you know, this famous baseball player. Thank God. He didn't let me get my dream. And now, you know, I thought I'd given up baseball by becoming a priest and now, God has allowed me to get back into baseball. But as a priest and to do the will of God has been the most, it's been the most incredible adventure of my life. Obviously, not everybody is called to be a priest, but God has a call and a mission for every single one of us. St. Joseph was a man who sought the will of God, you know, he listened when the angel said, you need to get out of town because Herod's trying to kill Jesus. And so St. Joseph listened and did the will of God and was able to protect his family. And so it goes back to the Importance of being men of prayer and seeking God's will. The fourth thing is that authentic men strive for holiness, and I know sometimes They seem impossible. Like I can't be holy. That's what John Paul II and Mother Teresa were and I can't do that. That's a lie. Matthew Kelly wrote a book called The Greatest Lie in the History of Christianity is that we can't be holy. The truth is we can. We need to be men who seek humility to live in the truth of who

we are. And to trust that God can use us with the gifts that we have to transform lives. We need to be men who live charity. This is all under Holiness. What does love mean? It means we will the good of the other person. And so that's the definition of love by St. Thomas Aquinas. And so first, we need humility in order to love because somebody who is humble, doesn't think about themselves. They think about others, remember? And that's one of the things to progress through those stages of manhood, we stop thinking about ourselves and we think about others. And so, again, Ephesians 5 A good man is willing to lay down his life for his bride just like Jesus did for the church. We need to be men who are chaste, you know, one of the biggest plagues in our in our world today is pornography. Billion-dollar industry! And I can honestly say, I as a Confessor, I'm almost surprised when a man does not confess that he's watching pornography. It's just kind of assumed that our culture that everybody's doing it, and in some ways that we make it sound like, Well, everybody's doing it then that, it's okay. But why is it so bad? Why is pornography so bad for us? It's a very selfish act. So, it's again, we're focusing on ourselves, it objectifies women, and we're helping an industry that might be involved in sex trafficking, objectifying and using underage children. And so I just want you to stop and think before you might fall to that that sin of pornography is to think I'm called to be holy, you know. I often use the example of a chalice and a Coca-Cola. Now, if I started to pour Coca-Cola in a chalice, what would you do? You'd say, you can't do that, father. And I'd say why? Because that chalice is, is sacred. It's meant for the blood of Christ. I said exactly how much more sacred are you your body? Then this chalice is sacred because the blood of Christ is in it, but you are a temple of the Holy Spirit. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. And so what do we ingest through our eyes, you know, through our senses. What are we pouring into our soul through the things that we see on TV and the internet? St. Joseph protected Mary and he honored her. I want you to protect your house as a man who is Holy we protect our family from the snares of the devil. We step into the breach as a bishop Olmsted of Phoenix, says, And in that Holiness we're also generous with our time, talent and treasure.

The last thing we'll finish with this is an authentic man knows the ultimate goal is heaven. And so somebody who wants to progress through these

stages from being a Boy, to an Adolescent, to a Man, to a Mentor, to a Patriarch is thinking everything I think and do should be toward the goal of not only getting to heaven myself, but to help me and my wife, my children, and my extended family, my friends, my co-workers, that they get to heaven as well. I think we all need a Paul, Barnabas and a Timothy in our lives. A Paul is someone who is our Mentor, they're kind of walking us along that journey, at least one step ahead of us. Oh, Barnabas, is that good friend that we're locking arms together and saying, let's do this together. Let's hold each other accountable. And then a Timothy is somebody that we are mentoring along that journey. That dynamic of having a Paul, Barnabas and a Timothy will help us to move along. From being Men to Mentors to ultimately, Patriarchs.

I want to finish with this.

Jesus said to St. Peter. This is in John chapter 21 verses 18 to 19. Amen. Amen. I say to you. When you were younger,(think about being boys), you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted (self-centered). But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. He said this signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, follow me. My brothers we have done what we wanted to do. We've dressed ourselves and we've all been selfish and in different ways. The Lord is calling us to leave those boyish desires behind our self-centeredness, and he wants us to move along that path to be real authentic men, ultimately mentors and Patriarchs. You and I, if we give ourselves over to the Lord, can transform the world. And so let us pray.

Heavenly Father. We thank you and praise you for the gift of your son, Jesus. We thank you for the great men throughout the ages who have shown us this path to go from Boys to Adolescents to Men to Mentors and Patriarchs. Help us to follow their example. Help us to pass on the faith. Help us to be real men who will live lives of sacrificial love. Help us to lay down our lives for others. And, may almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you all.