

Catholic Allies in Truth

EMASCULATING JESUS

by David Rippe

Survey after survey of Sunday Mass attendance in the U.S. shows more women than men in the pews. Female to male ratios of 2:1 or even higher are common. One might presuppose it's because women live longer, and thus, widows and spinsters would account for the difference. But the theory breaks down on examination by age category. Men of all ages simply don't come to Mass as faithfully as women.

Why not?

Mass is at the heart of the practice of Catholic faith. Attendance is mandatory. Yet too many Catholic men clearly don't take it seriously. Either their faith has cooled or else it never warmed in the first place.

When people aren't following Jesus, it is often because the Gospel has not been presented to them adequately.

The Catholic Faith is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the most incredible man who ever lived. It is about following Him and sharing in His life and work. If Jesus is presented accurately, men should want to come - and in droves. But they aren't coming.

One obvious reason is that the Church has been gradually de-emphasizing its masculine origins. In his book *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity*, author Leon Podles warns that if the Church continues on its current feminization trajectory, the gals will still come, but "...men will continue to seek their spiritual sustenance outside the churches, in false or inadequate religions, with highly damaging consequences for the church and society." Not to mention the consequences for their own souls.

Jesus is not commonly portrayed as the thoroughly masculine figure He was. Homilists too often put heavy emphasis on His mild side - His meekness, humility, tenderness, gentleness and mercy - His insistence on turning the other cheek and giving up even your coat to someone who asks for less. All are God-like qualities, to be sure, but also androgynous - not exactly attributes that, when taken alone, excite or inspire red-blooded heterosexual males. For men whose faith has already slipped below lukewarm and is rapidly approaching room temperature, exclusive emphasis on Jesus' benign traits perhaps competes weakly against a Sunday round of golf, a televised football game, or even just another hour of sleep. But a soft, mushy Jesus is hardly an accurate Jesus. The Gospels don't reveal an effeminate

Messiah. They depict a fearless warrior for the truth, a brave determined man who did amazing deeds, fought the good fight and died a horrible grisly death for the people He came to serve. Does it get any more manly?

If we look at Jesus in the entirety of His ministry, we find that He was anything but a milquetoast. Not once did He assemble the apostles for a group hug or engage them in self-esteem building exercises. In fact, He often chided them for their thick-headedness. Nor was it sexist male-bonding propensities, as feminists allege, that drove Him to pick twelve men to carry on His work.

This Jesus, tradesman from the tough little burg of Nazareth, was no lightweight. He was the Lion of Judah, not the kitten.

In sacred art, Jesus is often depicted holding a lamb in His arms the way a woman holds a baby. But if He ever did pick up a lamb, He probably slung it over His shoulder, man-style.

Jesus' meekness should not be confused with timidity. He boldly stood up to preach, even while angry thugs threatened to bash in His skull with rocks. It's tough to go to work every morning when somebody's always trying to murder you. But Jesus was a tough guy - not in the conventional corrupted sense of the word. He was tough because He was courageous, because He had no weaknesses, and because nothing could corrupt Him.

Demons were terrified of Jesus. He once drove a legion of them out of a blood-covered man and sent them into a herd of pigs that stampeded off a cliff and drowned. Not exactly the work of an effeminate.

Jesus' charisma, personal magnetism and people skills were off the charts. Crowds followed Him up mountains, across lakes and rivers - everywhere. With only a gesture, He could make even surly calloused fishermen drop their nets and come after Him. Ears bent on His every word.

Jesus was no wimp. He was the rock star of His age. A celebrity for sure, but not a hollow media manufacture dependent on drugs, sex and public adulation. To Hollywood and the popular culture, manliness consists of beating people up and bedding as many women as you can. But Jesus wasn't a swaggering brute who punched out Pharisees. He taught that you can be the stronger man by not returning a blow; that it is the weak man who seeks vengeance, the confident man forgives. He had the kind of macho it takes to break up fights and stonings. He showed us that the power of prayer was greater than any weapon.

And He taught that not only should a real man not get physical with women he isn't married to, but should resist even the urge to fantasize about it. He demanded the best from everybody. The love He spoke of was not sappy and wet-eyed or sentimental. It was Spirit-formed of unselfish sacrifice, and of people believing in Him and in each other.

Jesus said outlandish things, but He spoke with such manly authority that anyone with an open mind listened and believed. To prove He was who He said He was, Jesus broke all the laws of physics, chemistry and biology. He asked that, even if we struggled to accept His claims about His Godly nature, we should observe those incredible things He did - things no earthly man can duplicate - and believe from them.

He read minds, walked on water, quelled storms, healed birth defects, injuries and diseases - physical and mental. He was a walking, one-stop emergency room. His services were free. He understood addiction, dependence, despair and the other flaws of human nature, and saw them as slave chains to be broken. He once asked a man who had lived thirty-eight years as an invalid if he actually wanted to be cured. He invented "tough love." After healing cripples, He would tell them to pick up their mats and go live their lives.

He even raised the dead and put them back in the dance of life.

He showed us how to discipline ourselves through fasting and prayer, asserting that these acts could trigger miraculous things if we would but believe. He sometimes prayed all night long...intensely... until sweat poured from His face.

The ability to remain calm under duress is a quality men universally admire. Jesus slept through a storm on the lake while whitecaps churned, threatening to capsize the boat. Meanwhile, the supposedly strong men accompanying Him were hysterical. Don't question the Galilean's cool.

He feared nothing, nobody. In fact, He told us fear is useless. Even after his cousin had been beheaded for bearding the king, He went mano-a-mano with corrupt authorities and exposed their hypocrisy.

Boys typically learn how to be men by watching their fathers. Jesus spoke at length about His relationship with His Father, about the mutual affection between them, and of the importance of obedience and respect for proper authority.

Men like to think of themselves as breadwinners. Jesus had no equal in this field. He caught fish abundantly, even when no one else could. He showed that if we were

only willing to bring a little food to the table, He would multiply it, and multiply it and multiply it...

He made wine from water, then turned bread and wine into His own flesh and urged us to eat it, so that He could live in us and vice-versa.

And according to one of His earliest biographers, what has been written about Him barely even scratches the surface of all He did.

The courage and determination with which Jesus carried out His mission eventually cost Him His life. When His work was completed, He let Himself be taken prisoner. He didn't beg for light treatment. His tormentors taunted Him, struck Him, spit in His face, rammed thorns into His skull, shredded His back and flanks with scourges, destroyed His hands and feet and hung Him out in the hot sun until asphyxiation and dehydration killed Him.

In His manly chest, the robust heart that had beat relentlessly for more than thirty years, as He trode the rocky hills from Galilee to Judea, finally ceased its pulsing... and He lay still in the earth.

And then it resumed.

This is the Jesus men -and women- should fanatically want to follow. As an icon of manliness, He is everything admirable. Jesus is the perfect role model for men - a fearless warrior, protector, provider and healer, faithful to the end. That anyone would prefer the lesser gods of golf, football or sleep suggests they haven't been properly introduced to Him.

That must change.

May the Church always preach not the partial Jesus, but Jesus in His entirety as God and man, the Son.

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Submitted: March 24, 2013; Posted June 28, 2013