“Mirror of Patients”: A Reflection on the Honor of Serving as a Male Obstetrician-gynecologist

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Abstract

Physicians' work challenges them to learn and grow from their experiences with patients. Male obstetrician-gynecologists are uniquely blessed and challenged by their experiences in women's health care. The following is a reflection by one male obstetrician-gynecologist who considers the role of Saint Joseph in the holy family in contemplating his own role in providing women's health care.

Summary: One hundred twenty-five men who underwent therapy trying to change sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual were asked about negative and positive experiences. About two-thirds recorded changes of varying extent. There was also much decrease in suicidality, depression, and substance abuse, and increases in social functioning and self-esteem. Almost all harmful effects were none to slight and comparable to therapies for other unwelcome conditions.

Keywords

Ob/gyn, Physician reflection, St. Joseph, Women's health

As a husband and father, I have for years considered Saint Joseph a model of the virtues I need to foster in living out my personal vocation. More recently, I have appreciated some of the lessons that his life demonstrates in guiding my professional vocation as well. “Mirror of patience,” one of the more unique titles included in the Litany of Saint Joseph, points to an exemplary feature of this patron of the universal Church: that in service to his family, he must have constantly reflected the abundant mysteries and virtues—patience among others—contained in its most holy members. As I grow professionally, I appreciate more and more the privilege that physicians likewise have in beholding the mysteries of their patients and how this is particularly true for a male obstetrician-gynecologist.

Saint Joseph must have found himself in a very unique position within the holy family. He was surrounded by grace, sharing a home with the only

sinless, perfect human beings that the world would know. He had constant cause for contemplation of some of the greatest mysteries to ever occur: the immaculate conception, annunciation, and incarnation, to name a few that must have struck Saint Joseph with awe despite his not directly participating in any of them. *Some of these mysteries came not without social scandal, especially the incarnation. Scripture reveals that Saint Joseph at least once considered relieving himself of the duties assigned to him for fear of that scandal. Where a more hasty man*

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would have “bailed,” Saint Joseph patiently received reassurance by way of God’s messenger and followed through on his mission. Imagine also the patience with his own self which Saint Joseph must have faced each day surrounded by sinless wife and son. And yet, notwithstanding every reminder of his weakness by comparison, he must have appreciated his role in the family as not merely symbolic or in some way socially necessary, but even instrumental in complying with God’s will. He must have found fulfillment in guiding our Lady to a safe delivery at the first Christmas, in protecting the family during the flight into Egypt, and in building and maintaining a home for them with his hands, knowing that in his own way he shared in salvation history along with his very co-redeemers.

Although on a completely different scale, I often find myself in a similarly unique position as a male obstetrician-gynecologist. I am constantly in contact with women who, though of course not sinless, channel God’s grace in their personal and family lives by way of humanity’s greatest virtue: sacrificial love to those around them. Even if only intellectually, my profession compels me to ponder some of the most mysterious, awesome, and dramatic phenomena in medicine and human physiology: gestation, parturition, and lactation are a few examples. Although as a man I may never directly experience these mysteries, they are frequent reminders of how fearfully and wonderfully we are made. And yet as a male ob-gyn, I am not only a witness to these most intimate events but also invited to actively participate! I find great honor in overseeing a pregnancy to safe completion, in supporting women’s physiologic integrity despite a culture that seems ever more to seek to disrupt or control it, and in knowing that

my hands can help restore health where it has been compromised.

Saint Joseph was a mirror of the many virtues that filled his home, reflecting often on those mysteries that, despite being unique to our Lord and our Lady, he had some role in bringing to their completion. Every physician is at times a “mirror of patients,” so to speak, beholding the wonders of those he or she serves. A male obstetrician gynecologist particularly, like Saint Joseph, is uniquely positioned to reflect on the untold mysteries of those he serves, and honored to serve in bringing to completion those awesome experiences beyond his very nature.

It is worth noting that Saint Joseph has many titles; at least one other could draw parallels to the work of an obstetrician. I will, however, leave “model of all who labor” as a topic for another discussion.

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Biographical Note

Jonathan D. Scrafford, MD, is an obstetrician-gynecologist.