



Healing Our Image of God's Fatherhood

Read: *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraphs 239, and 222-227

Doesn't it seem like the Father is the hardest Person of the Trinity to have a close relationship with?

Jesus is our Friend and Brother. The Holy Spirit is the one we rely on for understanding and wisdom. But the Father is the scary one. He's the one who punishes us. He expects perfection from us. And He's too far away up there in Heaven to help us with our little daily problems. Right? Wrong!



The Father gives us total love and kindness and mercy. He gave us Jesus so we won't have to face punishment for our sins. He is completely patient with us regardless of how imperfect we are. And He's intimately and infinitely concerned about our daily trials.

So why doesn't it feel like He's this wonderful?

We received our first images of what God the Father is like from our human fathers, but they loved us insufficiently, no matter how good of a dad they were. Because they (or other authority figures) punished us, we project onto God the image of a father who whips us when we fail to live up to His expectations. If the father-figures in our lives have been unhappy with us when we failed to live up to their expectations, we think God, too, is unhappy with us. If our dads died during our childhood, or left the family, or traveled a lot on business, we unconsciously assume that Father God, too, won't be close when we need His help.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains (in paragraph 239):

By calling God "Father," the language of faith indicates ... that He is goodness and loving care for all His children.... The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood.... He transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although He is their origin and standard: no one is father as God is Father.

We can learn a lot about who God the Father really is when we meditate on the words Jesus gave us when He taught us how to pray: *Our Father*....

The Person of the Trinity to whom we entrust our prayers is the Father. How much trust do we really have in Him? If our human fathers/authority figures could not be trusted all the time (no one but God is totally trustable), we think God will also let us down. Jesus put the truth into two commandments:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

When we pray "**Our Father**", we enter into a relationship of complete love with and trust in Him. When we pray "**Our Father**", we are uniting ourselves to the community of God's children and committing ourselves to loving each other and ourselves as Christ loves us: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

The *Catechism* tells us that having a loving relationship with the Father "has enormous consequences for our whole life" (para. 222-227):

- "It means coming to know God's greatness and majesty." No matter how loving and powerful and caring and helpful and wise we think God is, He is infinitely more-so. But we box Him up in our minds, believing He is limited, because all examples and understandings of what He's like have been limited. When our problems become overwhelming, and it seems that God's help is very limited, it's because we imagine Him to be who He is not.

This is when it's time to pray, "Our Father, give me this day my daily bread, and help me get in touch with how You are loving me right here and now."



- "It means living in thanksgiving ... everything we are and have comes from Him." How much credit do we give to ourselves and our hard work for the good things in life? How much credit do we give to luck or help or assistance? In fact, nothing good exists except that it comes from Him! When we pray "Hallowed by thy name," right after calling God "our Father," we would utter it with the awe of thankfulness if we truly believed in the total goodness of God's Fatherhood.
- "It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all men." If we really believe that God is the Father of all, we have no prejudices, no feelings of being superior to certain people, no fears of being inferior to others, and no difficulty loving even the most unlikable folks. Since God's love for all people is unlimited and unconditional, being in a close relationship with the Father creates in us the same love for everyone. But as long as we can point out that there is someone whom God does not totally love because he or she is undeserving, we will have a hard time believing that the Father totally loves us, because we, too, are unworthy.
- "It means making good use of created things ... to use everything that is not God only insofar as it brings us closer to Him, and to detach ourselves from it insofar as it turns us away from Him."

What possessions, what people, what habits and ideas and dreams are hard to let go of? When we truly believe that the Father loves us completely, nothing seems more important than spending time sitting in His love, sharing our hearts with Him, and doing favors for Him. If a neighbor's TV breaks and he can't afford to replace it, we don't mind giving our TV to him because we are excited to share what we have. If the church asks for more money, we don't mind increasing our donations because we know that the Father is generous with us. What do we love more than God?

- "It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity." Do we see blessings in the troubles we experience? Yes, if we believe He is taking care of us as a Good Father, working a plan that will make good come of it. What do we think about God when He doesn't answer our prayers the way we want Him to and in the timing we desire? Do we say, "God has a better idea than I do of how to answer this prayer," or do we take matters into our own hands? Often we make things happen before we have all the resources (e.g. understanding, patience, sacrificial love and know-how to stay in a difficult relationship, money instead of credit cards, the involvement of the right people). When we rush ahead of God, we are not believing that He is a good and caring Father.

St. Augustine summed it up well. He said, "Our Father: at this name love is aroused in us ... and the confidence of obtaining what we are about to ask.... What would He not give to His children who ask, since He has already granted them the gift of being His children?"