

# God the Father

A Lesson in Learning to Love

## The Desire for God

- ⇒ “Throughout history even to the present day there is found among different peoples a certain **awareness of a hidden power**, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. At times there is present even a **recognition of a supreme being**, or still more of a **Father**” (*Nostra aetate*, n. 2).
- ⇒ “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 1,1).
  - Our desire is written in the human heart

## Coming to know God

### ⇒ The Ways of Coming to Know God

#### ▣ World

- “For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made.” (Romans 1:19-20)

#### ▣ Human Person – openness to

- Truth
- Beauty
- Moral Goodness
- Transcendence

## God Comes to Meet Us

⇒ so ....God is known in his creation and in the human person

⇒ There is another way of knowing God beyond our natural powers

#### ▣ God's revelation of God's self

▣ in Sacred Scripture

## God as Father in Scripture

- ⇒ “God the **Father**, God the **Son**, and God the Holy **Spirit**.”
  - ▣ Basic language of Christianity
    - Blessings
    - Prayers
  - ▣ Where does the image of God as Father come from?
- ⇒ Scripture
  - ▣ God as Father is theme of the New Testament
  - ▣ Revealed in relationship with the Son
  - ▣ 19 NT verses use the exact reference “God the Father”; many more refer to God as “Father”
- ⇒ But also in the Hebrew Scriptures

## For Israel, God is called “Father”

- ⇒ as he is **Creator** of the world. (Dt 32:6, Mal 2:10)
- ⇒ Even more, God is Father because of the **covenant** and the **gift of the law** to Israel, “his first-born son.” (Ex 4:22)
- ⇒ God is also called the Father of the **king of Israel** (2 Sam 7:14)
- ⇒ Most especially he is “the **Father of the poor**”, of the orphaned and the widowed, who are under his loving protection. (Ps 68:6)

## The Father Who Saves

- ⇒ The perception of God as Father
  - is linked less to his creative work than
  - to his **saving interventions** in history by which he establishes a special covenant relationship with Israel.
- ⇒ Moses and the Exodus
  - “You shall say to the Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born **son**’” (Ex 4:22).
- ⇒ In their hour of desperation
  - “Have mercy, O Lord, upon the people called by your name, upon Israel, whom you have likened to a first-born **son**” (Sir 36:11).

## Israel’s Ambivalent Response

- ⇒ God often laments that this fatherly love has not received a suitable response:
  - “The Lord has spoken: ‘**Sons** have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me’” (Isaiah 1:2)
- ⇒ Yet for Israel, God's fatherhood seems more solid than human fatherhood:
  - “Even if my **father** and **mother** forsake me, the LORD will take me in” (Ps 27:10)

## Covenant – A Family Affair

- ⇒ “You are the sons of the Lord your God.... For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a **people for his own possession**, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth” (Dt 14:1 ff).
- ⇒ “**I will be a father to you**, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor 6:18, cf. 2 Sm 7:14, Is 43:6, Jer 31:9)

## Compassion of God

- ⇒ The divine fatherhood in Israel's regard is marked by an intense, constant and **compassionate love**.
  - “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks, and I bent down to them and fed them.... How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender” (Hos 11:3f., 8; Jer 31:20).
- ⇒ Even the **reproof** becomes the expression of a **privileged love**,
  - “My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11-12).

## Divine Fatherhood

- ⇒ There is more than can be said about the revelation of Fatherhood in the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures)
- ⇒ ...and then there is Revelation in the person of Jesus Christ
  - Revelation of **Jesus as Son**, and
  - thus Revelation of **God as Father**

## Jesus reveals the Father

- ⇒ Jesus' Origin
  - "I came from the **Father** and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the **Father**." (John 16:28)
- ⇒ Jesus: where humans meet the Father
  - "Whoever has seen me has seen the **Father**. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (John 14:9-10)

## Jesus Reveals the Father

- ⇒ Jesus: Source of the **Father's** gift of salvation
  - "So must the **Son** of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only **Son**, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."  
(John 3:14-16)
- ⇒ Eternal Life
  - Insertion into the movement of love uniting **Father** and **Son**, who are one  
(John 10:30, 17:21-22)

## Jesus reveals His Father in Life

- ⇒ As a boy, Jesus answered Mary and Joseph who had been looking anxiously for him
  - "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in **my Father's** house?" (Luke 2:49)
- ⇒ At his baptism
  - "You are my beloved **Son**; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11)
- ⇒ When he healed on the Sabbath
  - "My **Father** is at work until now, so I am at work" (John 5:17)

## Jesus reveals “Abba”

- ⇒ “**Abba**, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.” (Mark 14:36)
  - Aramaic: Intimate term for ‘dad’ or ‘daddy’
  - Term of endearment or love
- ⇒ Reveals our relationship to God
  - “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are **children** of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘**Abba**, Father!’ ” (Romans 5:18)
  - “Our **Father**, in heaven, hallowed be your name...” (Matthew 6:9)

## Jesus reveals the Father in Death

- ⇒ At his crucifixion
  - “**Father**, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34)
  - “**Father**, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46)
- ⇒ In his resurrection
  - “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to **my Father** and **your Father**, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17)

## **Jesus and the Father: God is love...**

- ⇒ “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us, **God is love**, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.” (1 John 4:16)
  - heart of the Christian faith:
    - the Christian image of God, and
    - the resulting image of mankind and its destiny.

## ***Deus Caritas Est* – Pope Benedict XVI**

- ⇒ “We have come to believe in God’s love” (1 John 4:16)
- ⇒ In these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life.
  - Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.
  - John’s Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should...have eternal life” (John 3:16)

## Love – our response

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.

Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.

In this way the love of God was revealed to us:

God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.

In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.

(1 John 4:7-11)

⇒ Since **God has first loved us**

- ▣ love is now no longer a mere “command”
- ▣ it is the **response** to the gift of God’s love

## Love’s fullest response

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus said to him, “**You shall love the Lord**, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself**. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

(Matthew 22:36-40)

## Love forms the Church

- ⇒ Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable
  - they form a single commandment.
  - Love grows through love.
- ⇒ Love is “divine” because it comes from God the Father, in Christ, and unites us to God
  - it makes us a “we” which transcends our divisions
  - makes us one, until in the end God is “all in all”  
(1 Cor 15:28)

## Christian Life...

- ⇒ Learning to know **God as Father**
  - through His only **Son, Jesus Christ**
  - in the **Holy Spirit** – the love of God poured into us  
(cf. Romans 5:5)
- ⇒ Becoming whole and complete, authentically human by the measure with which we love
- ⇒ Until then perhaps we pray along with St. Augustine:  
**“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you”**