

THE FATHER REVEALED BY JESUS CHRIST

MIGUEL ANGEL FUENTES

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REVEALED
BY JESUS CHRIST



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“You have but one Father in heaven.”

(Mt 23:9)

“I know, O Lord God Almighty, that I owe You, as the chief duty of my life, the devotion of all my words and thoughts to Yourself. The gift of speech which You have bestowed can bring me no higher reward than the opportunity of service in preaching You and displaying You as You are, as Father and Father of God the Only-begotten, to the world in its blindness and the heretic in his rebellion.”

(Saint Hilary, *On the Trinity*, Bk. I, 37)

“If He Himself grants generation to others, He is not sterile.”

(Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, 2)

“Jesus’ devotion was to the Father. How should His devotion not be ours?” wrote Émile Guerry. For this reason, it should surprise us how little Christians know God the Father, and even more so if we bear in mind that the main theme of Jesus Christ’s teachings was precisely the mystery of His Father. Jesus spent a great deal of His public life speaking with the Father and speaking of the Father, starting from His first public intervention when He was just 12 years old: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49). Yet, despite having read or heard the Gospels so many times, how many there are who think that the paternal reality of God is strange or perhaps, understanding it only intellectually, let it influence their lives very little!

From here it follows that confidence in God, which is the foundation of maturity and of a balanced life, is an unknown virtue for many men and women. How could it be otherwise? Let’s consider a small child. He lives free from all of life’s concerns because “his parents look after them,” both those of the present as

well as those of the future. He blindly trusts in them, and abandons all his cares into their hands, even though, in practice, they are not able to solve them. However, his confidence does not rest on the fact of seeing them as big and powerful in comparison to his personal limitations; he also sees many other adults as big and strong, and yet, in spite of this, if he doesn't know them or have frequent dealings with them, he tends to distrust them, hiding himself behind his mother's dress. This is because it's not the qualities of "big" or "strong" that feed his confidence, but rather his personal ties ("paternity," "maternity," "fraternity") that unite him to certain adults in particular. The pagans too understood that there was a Supreme Being, omnipotent and infinite, but they felt fear rather than trust in His presence. This is why they sought to "placate" Him and "keep Him happy," rather than to tenderly love Him; it never occurred to them that they could enter into an intimate relationship with Him until Jesus came to speak of "our Father in heaven," and to place a feeling of filial piety and unlimited confidence towards "His Father and our Father" (cf. Jn 20:17) into our hearts.

But, how very few people know what Jesus has taught!

Several years ago, as I was giving a conference about the family in a city in the north of Argentina, a young woman who was very worried came forward to ask me about the topic I had presented on: the ever more frequent and serious problem of the missing

father in the upbringing of children.¹ I had based my work on a study by Dr. Paul Vitz on “the faith of the *fatherless*,” wherein the author analyzes the influence that the lack of a father—or the experience of a bad father—had in the lives of some well-known atheists. The woman was a single mother of two small children who had grown up without any sort of paternal figure. “What should I do,” she asked me, “so that they don’t suffer from those terrible struggles?” My answer was the same that I have given to everyone in that and in similar situations: “Talk to them about God the Father; in the measure that it’s possible, make up for that paternal figure that they don’t have with the living reality of the Father who will never abandon them. Read what Jesus has explained in the Gospel about His Father, and pass it on to your children.”

If the absence of an earthly father or mother is so harmful in the spiritual and psychological development of every human being, a good education of our divine filiation (which is more difficult if there’s no earthly paternal figure, but always possible) can mature the hearts of many of those who don’t know themselves because they don’t know God or, even if they do know Him, don’t have an intimate relationship with Him.

Devotion to the Father, says Faber, is characterized “by an infinite tenderness.” What’s more, though, as Émile Guerry points out, “it *elevates* souls by giving their life the most noble of ideals,

¹ Cf. Fuentes, Miguel, *Crisis de paternidad. El padre ausente*, Virtus/7, San Rafael (2008).

that which fills Jesus' entire life: the glory of the Father that *frees* them, by purifying them of the selfishness that can penetrate even the most sincere devotion, and establishes them in *peace*, establishing them in the certainty of the infinite Love of the Father, who is full of mercy and goodness."

In the third century, Saint Hippolytus wrote: "Know yourself; i.e., discover God within yourself, for He has formed you after His own image" (*Refutation of All Heresies*, Bk. 10, 33-34). We could add that you cast self-knowledge aside when you don't know the God who made you; you don't know the God who made you when you have only an abstract, cold, and distant knowledge of Him, ignorant of His living presence in the depths of your soul and when you lack a living and filial contact with Him.

The Father was the heart of Jesus' preaching; the Father called Him, "My Beloved Son." Have all of us Christians understood it this way? Have we understood Jesus Christ's message? I doubt it! And yet we don't think it's strange to find ourselves surrounded by confused orphans who are bitter at life!

Therefore, herein lies the simple objective of the few pages that follow: to try to present some texts in which Jesus uncovers for us His thoughts about the Heavenly Father. I will present only the main passages from the Gospels where Jesus speaks of His Father, leaving aside, with few exceptions, the incredibly rich texts of the other New Testament writings.

1.

An Unknown Father

“Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ”
(Jn 17:3).

The heart of Our Lord’s preaching was to make God the Father known: “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him” (Mt 11:27). And Jesus wanted to reveal this to all those who *want to receive this revelation*.

“The primary purpose of the Son,” writes Saint Hilary, “[was] to enable us to know the Father” (*De Trinitate*, Bk. 3, 22).

The entirety of Jesus’ public life consisted in making God known as Father. In fact, some authors divide our Savior’s teaching into three periods: in the first, He showed men that *God is Father*; in the second He revealed that *God is His Father*; and in the last period He taught us that *God also becomes our Father*.

How much do we know God the Father?

Perhaps we might know that God *is* Father, but all the while understanding that divine “fatherhood” in a way that is confused with His status as Creator. For many, including well-formed Christians, God is Father in the sense that He is the cause of all things. Such a mode of divine fatherhood was and is also acknowledged by many non-Christian religions.

However, this isn’t the sort of fatherhood that Jesus Christ alludes to. If that fatherhood can only be known by the one to whom the Son reveals it, it must therefore concern a fatherhood that is absolutely transcendent, mysterious, and inaccessible to human reason.

What does that divine, revealed fatherhood have that is different from the common divine fatherhood that can be known by human reason?

First and foremost, it entails a communication of life (to be a father means to communicate life) that is completely special: it isn’t simply the giving of being, but rather of God’s personal life itself. God “divinizes” man; He participates His own intimate life.

What’s more, as a father, God desires *intimacy* with His children, with each one in particular.

Likewise, His love is completely unique, to the point of “sacrificing Himself” for His children, not simply as any real father would do for his little ones, but rather in a way that no earthly

father is able to surrender himself (we see this in a particular way with Christ's death on the cross).

This Father's capacity to forgive surpasses human understanding. This is why the pagans spoke of God as a common father, but not as one who forgives. They placated Him with sacrifices, but they didn't thank Him for the forgiveness of sins because His merciful will escaped their understanding.

How far does our knowledge of the Father extend? In the brief letter that he wrote, the Apostle Saint Jude calls us "beloved in God the Father" (Jd 1:1). Is this the way we see ourselves? Are we aware of the Father's heart and of His attitude towards us? Do we live trusting in that fatherly gaze?

The author of the *Imitation of Christ* wrote this beautiful prayer:

"I bless You, O heavenly Father, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, for having condescended to remember me, a poor creature. Thanks to You, O Father of mercies, God of all consolation, Who with Your comfort sometimes refresh me, who am not worthy of it. I bless You always and glorify You with Your only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, forever and ever. Ah, Lord God, my holy Lover, when You come into my heart, all that is within me will rejoice. You are my glory and the exultation of my heart. You are my hope and refuge in the day of my tribulation" (*Imitation of Christ*, III, 5).

2.

A Father who dwells in our hearts

“We will come to him and make our dwelling with him”

(Jn 14:23).

Where is God? Everywhere. However, in a special way, He is in the heart of the just, that is, the one who lives in the state of grace. This is both an affirmation and a promise of Jesus: “my Father will love him, and we will . . . make our dwelling with him”

“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.’ Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, ‘Master, [then] what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will

come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn 14: 20-23).

“You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you,” wrote Saint Augustine. This dwelling of the Father in man’s heart is not what theologians call the presence of “immensity,” in which God is present in all things by giving them their being and keeping them in being. This is something completely different. The Father sends the Son to each heart in the state of grace; and the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit, and the Father comes by Himself. God the Father is, therefore, in the deepest depths of the heart in order to be known and loved.

What for? “So that we might use and enjoy Him,” says Saint Thomas with words full of daring. When something is given to someone, explains the Angelic Doctor, it’s so that the recipient can enjoy and take delight in the gift received. If Jesus says that God the Father gives Himself to us, this means that He wants us to enjoy His Person (cf. *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, a. 3, ad 1).

It’s a mystery that’s too vast to be completely understood, and it might seem too good to be true. But it *is* true! The Lord’s own promise guarantees it since, as He said, “I am the Truth.”

The presence of the Most Holy Trinity in the hearts of the faithful is the greatest proof of God’s love. As Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote, “The Trinity: here is our home. . . . It seems to me that I have found my heaven on earth, since Heaven is God, and God is in my soul. The day I understood this everything became clear to me. I confide to you what has made my life an an-

anticipated Heaven – believing that a Being called Love dwells in us at every moment of the day and night and that he asks us to live in communion with him.”

In reality, God “hounds” us with His ways of presence. Rightfully Saint Paul said, “In him we live and move and have our being” (Ac 17:28). This is because we know that God is present in all things giving them their being and keeping them in existence; He becomes present in creatures by pouring out their perfections into them, so that we might be raised up to what is invisible through the ladder of the visible; Jesus is present in a unique and sublime way in the Eucharist. However, in addition to all these different ways, the entire Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are also present in each soul in the state of grace.

With complete sense Saint Paul affirms: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Co 6:19).

Every day we must submerge ourselves in our own hearts and there, in solitude and silence, adore God the Father, since this gesture of His infinite generous kindness is a manifestation of His fatherhood. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: “a feeling of the presence of God would come over me unexpectedly, so that I could in no wise doubt either that he was within me, or that I was wholly absorbed in him” (*Life*, 10, 1).

How often do we adore God the Father present in our hearts? If we don’t do so, or if we do so rarely, how can we attempt to love Him or to grow in our love and our knowledge of Him if, while living together with Him, we aren’t able to pay any attention

to Him? Do we ask as Philip did: “Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us”? If we do, perhaps we have heard the same words that Philip did: “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip?”

On November 21st, 1904, Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote this prayer that is known as “Elevation to the Blessed Trinity”:

O my God, Trinity that I adore,
help me to forget myself completely,
and to establish myself in you,
still and at peace,
as if my soul was already in eternity.
Let nothing disturb my peace,
or make me come out of you,
O my unchangeable One,
but let every minute carry me further
into the depths of your mystery!
Pacify my soul;
make it your heaven,
your beloved abode and the place of your rest;
may I never leave you there alone,
but may I be there totally,
totally awakened in my faith,
all in adoration, totally surrendered
to your creative action.

O my beloved Christ, crucified out of love,

I would like to be a spouse for your heart.

I would like to cover you with glory;

I would like to love you . . . until I should die of love. . .

But I feel helpless.

I ask you to clothe me with yourself,

to identify my soul with all the movements of your soul,

to immerse me,

to fill me,

to substitute yourself for me,

so that my life may be only a radiance of your life.

Enter into me as an Adorer,

as one who atones and as one who saves.

O Eternal Word, Word of my God,

I want to spend my life listening to you,

I want you to make myself totally teachable so that I may
learn everything from you.

Then,

through all the nights,

all the voids, all the elements of my helplessness,

I want to be centered on you always

and remain in your great light.

O my beloved Star,

make me spellbound,

so that I may no more move away from your radiance.

O consuming Fire, Spirit of love,
arise in me
so that there may occur in me, as it were,
an Incarnation of the Word;
may I be for it
an additional humanity in whom
he may renew his whole mystery.

And you, O Father,
bend over your little creature,
see in her only the Beloved,
in whom you are well pleased.

O my "Three," my all,
my bliss,
infinite Solitude,
Immensity in which I love myself,
I surrender myself to you as a prey.
Bury yourself in me so that I may bury myself in you,
while waiting to go to contemplate in your light the abyss
of your greatness.

3.

A Father who listens to us

“Ask and you will receive”

(Jn 16:24).

We shouldn't understand Jesus' affirmation here in the absolute sense of receiving precisely that which we ask for, because God knows that many things that we ask for usually aren't appropriate for us, or would be useless or even harmful for us. Our knowledge is limited; only God knows all things.

Rather, what it means is that “your prayer, if it is well-made, will never be fruitless.”

Just as the dew that comes down to the earth doesn't return to the heavens without having made the earth fruitful, so it is with prayer.

Everything that God touches bears fruit. Likewise, everything that touches God becomes fruitful. He is the tree of life set in the center of paradise.

If well-made, our prayer touches God's heart. It can't remain fruitless!

It obtains, and always obtains, peace, serenity, and conformity.

In fact, it is Jesus Christ who is the guarantor of God the Father in this offer of total confidence. The Father doesn't lie; neither does Jesus Christ. Therefore, the success of prayer cannot be doubted.

God does not deceive, says Saint Paul. I know in whom I have placed my trust.

I swear it, God often repeats in Scripture (cf. Ez 34:8).

In these words of Jesus, there is also a total affirmation, like an oath.

4.

A Father for whom we are very valuable

“Are you not worth more than many sparrows?”

(Cf. Mt 6:27)*

These words are found in Jesus’ discourse regarding God’s fatherly providence (Mt 6:25-34). Hence, they refer to how valuable each child is to God the Father.

Aren’t we worth more “to the Father” than the birds of the air?

To be worth makes reference to price.

How much does God “appraise” us at?

* This is the citation given in the original; Mt. 10:31 would seem better – Translator’s note.

Saint Peter said it: “You were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb” (1 Pe 1:18-19).

Saint Paul too: “You have been purchased at a price” (1 Co 6:20).

How many men and women live overwhelmed by the demon of “worthlessness”? They think that they aren’t worth anything, that there’s no meaning to the world, that they aren’t precious or important for anyone.

This is a most unjust thought. In a brief but beautiful parable, one that applies to the Father’s attitude towards us, Jesus has described the immense value that each one of us has in God’s eyes: “What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost” (Mt 18:12-14).

Behind that feeling of “being worthless,” there is a certain lack of humility that buries its roots in pride that eats away at what is best in every person, since being forgotten, disparaged, and being left to the lowest place, hurt the proud person more than physical wounds. Even more is this true for the one who is *secretly* prideful, that is, the proud person who doesn’t even recognize that spiteful defect!

In addition to being a lack of virtue, this feeling of unfounded inferiority is based on a false or unjust principle. It is false because God has valued us at an infinite price. It's unjust, because we reproach God for a non-existent forgetfulness. For God we are important. Even though we shouldn't seek "to be important" (in the sense that is born from pride), we must acknowledge that we are (which is born from realism):

“My son, with humility have self-esteem;
and give yourself the esteem you deserve” (Sir 10:28)

Humility consists in living in the awareness of the fact that this great value that we have in God's eyes: (a) isn't something that we deserve, because everything that God finds in us is what He Himself has put into our hearts (it's in us but it doesn't come from us); (b) it doesn't excuse us from making the effort to live a holy life, since God will not spare us from condemnation (eternal separation from Him) if we don't take care to do what He asks of us; (c) it is more than enough to make us happy, since what that value is really worth is to be measured on the gold balance of the divine sight, while what other people think about us, their acknowledgment or forgetfulness of us, doesn't add or take away anything,

The Father's eyes make everything that they look upon grow with love. His eyes are what *give* value to us by looking upon us with tenderness and care. “Moses was extremely beautiful [in the eyes of God],” Scripture says (Ac 7:20). Just like Moses, each one of us is *beautiful in God's eyes*, because He sees in us the image of

His Son which He Himself has carved in our souls: “For we are the aroma of Christ for God” (2 Co 2:15).

Our inferiority complexes (from which spring the bitterest reactions of superiority and prepotency) are fought with this awareness of the value that God has placed in our souls.

5.

A Father who delights in His children

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

(Mt 3:17; cf. Mk 1:11; 9:7; Mt 17:5).

Matthew and Mark repeat these words of God the Father several times, words that are heard in Jesus’ two principal theopanies: during His Baptism and in His transfiguration.

Clearly, they refer to Jesus in a unique and special way; however, they also have a certain “application” to each baptized person who is another Christ on account of their baptismal character.

They reveal a “loving” Father, a Father in love with His Son, a Father able to refer to His Son as “the beloved,” an expression that Saint Paul will also apply to Jesus later: “the Beloved [of the Father]” (cf. Ep 1:6), or “His Beloved Son,” as the Vulgate trans-

lates it. On another occasion, Jesus says: “the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does” (Jn 5:20).

Jesus was constantly aware that He was loved by the Father: “This is why the Father loves me” (Jn 10:17); “As the Father loves me” (Jn 15:9).

God is Love, as Saint John says. Love is His Essence: the Father is the One who Loves, the Son is the Beloved, the Holy Spirit is the Love that unites Lover and Beloved.

At the same time, that Beloved Son is also the Son “given up for love of men.” “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him . . . might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

If the measure of love stands out in the gift that is made to the one whom is loved (since love is shown in gifts, and the measure of the love is the measure of the gifts), then we must conclude, obligated by this logic, that God has as much love for men as He has for His only-begotten Son, since He was able to surrender the Son for them. This is possible because God the Father has recorded the very image of the Son-Word in the heart of every human being. For this reason the Father can love every person with a love similar to the one that He has for the Son.

Thus, the expression “the Father’s beloved” can be applied (analogously, of course) to every person in whom the inerasable image of God can be found in the essence of the soul. Jesus Himself affirms this at the last Supper: “The Father himself loves you,

because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God” (Jn 16:27).

We must always have this great truth before us: we are God’s children, because God the Father has wanted us to be His children. There is an *expressed desire* on the Father’s part to make us children. As Saint Paul says, “God sent his Son . . . *so that we might receive adoption*” (Ga 4:4); that means, He ordered that we be made children through Jesus.

The one who feels “unloved” by God, a sort of abortion of Divine Love, a pariah before God, lies to themselves; they don’t understand the mystery of their call to eternal life, nor the dignity of their souls, nor their supernatural vocation to “configure themselves” with Jesus Christ: “he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ” (Ep 1:5); “He also predestined [them] to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rm 8:29).

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are!” (1 Jn 3:1).

6.

A Father worthy of respect

“You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”

(Mt 4:7; Dt 6:16)

Jesus has an extraordinary affection and confidence with His Father, but this response, given twice to Satan during the temptations in the desert, also shows the incredible respect Christ felt for Him. “I honor my Father, but you dishonor me,” (Jn 8:49) He complained to His adversaries. “The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve” (Mt 4:10; Dt 6:13).

In this way, Jesus highlights the transcendence of God the Father, to whom are owed adoration, worship, and respect.

God is a loving Father, but you can't play around with God. That God is loving and that affection marks our relations with Him doesn't imply that we can take God lightly.

Unfortunately, those who live in today's world—the ones who still believe in God—often don't take Him very seriously.

As proof, it's enough to think of the great number of men and women who don't "understand" how Infinite Goodness can go together with eternal punishment: we're used to hearing "if God is good, then He can't condemn anyone." This reasoning then pushes them (or gives them license) to take life as a joke and to mock God's law. If God is going to save them anyways, what's the point of following a law that is at times difficult or bitter?

However, this way of thinking betrays, in the background, a mistaken image of God the Father. For many, a "good" father means a "permissive" father, one who is good to a fault. For the world, to "love" is to "permit"; they think that if someone loves another, they don't prohibit, punish, or correct.

However, a father who doesn't know how to punish when love itself demands it doesn't really love. Perhaps such a one might think they love, but God's Word is very harsh in this respect: it says that such a father "hates" (Prov 13:24). This is why even fathers who don't seem to be bad often err. When Amnon, David's son, raped his half-sister, the book of Samuel says that "King David . . . became very angry. He would not, however, punish Amnon, his high-spirited son; he loved him, because he was his firstborn" (2 Sm 13:21). It was precisely because he didn't punish Amnon in that moment that much later he wept over his son's dead body when his other half-brother, Absalom, took revenge for the shame of his humiliated sister by taking Amnon's

life. A phrase that has been attributed to Leonardo da Vinci says, “He who does not punish evil, commands it to be done.”

A gardener who doesn’t straighten a plant when it begins to bend ruins its future, since the time will come when that plant, when it has grown into a tree, will break and fall, or it will be a danger to all those who pass under its shadow and it will need to be cut down. The one who permits it to grow “according to its desires” bears the guilt of its poor or short life.

Nonetheless, in spite of understanding these metaphors in the right way, for the world, the *good* person is the one who lets others do what they will: “laissez faire.” This is what worldly people think that God must be like if He wants to be accepted as a father: He shouldn’t correct, threaten, punish, or otherwise ruin the feast of the joys of life.

Jesus says that the Father is not simply Good, but Wonderfully and Completely Good. However, He also explains that it is His very goodness that brings Him—out of love for men and women—to remind them that they must give God the place that is His: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” What is God’s is the whole soul.

Christ’s disciples understood this very well when they saw Him full of anger in the Temple, and saying to those who sold doves and changed money in it: “Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace” (Jn 2:16).

You can’t mess around with God; we can’t set Him aside, or take Him as a joke.

God the Father must be respected and given His place, and we must remember His transcendence.

This can all be summed up in one word: “Adore.” Adore Him alone.

7.

A Father to imitate

“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect”

(Mt 5:48).

It’s a law of life that children are like their parents: not only in their physical characteristics but rather—and perhaps even more—in their movements, gestures, language, mannerisms, reactions, thought processes, psychology, etc.

This similarity is owed to imitation (generally unconscious) and this, in turn, to frequent contact (the daily living together).

Here Jesus is speaking of a need: “*Be.*”

It’s an imperative.

It’s as if He were to have said: “You are God’s children; therefore, be like your Father.”

May others “recognize” Whose children you are from your traits.

As Jesus told the Pharisees and the scribes who persecuted Him: “You are doing the works of your father [*the devil!*]” (Jn 8:41); “You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth. . . . But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me” (Jn 8:44-45). Because of their disbelief and their rejection of the truth, those adversaries of the Lord showed that they were children of “The Rejecter of the Truth,” of him “who did not remain in the truth,” that is, the devil.

Jesus ordered us to imitate our Father’s perfection. The Lord thus judges that we are able to know God, and even to know Him “perfectly,” in a certain sense, and, even more, to *imitate* Him.

From here we can conclude that if we do not know our Father, the fault is ours. Likewise, if we don’t imitate Him, the fault is also ours.

Perhaps we think that we don’t know Him, even though He is in front of us. A tree can be in front of our eyes, but if we look for it somewhere else, we will think that we have never encountered it before. Philip tells Jesus at the Last Supper: “Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us” (Jn 14:8). And Jesus replies with a reproach: “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

Imitate God! This seems to be an impossible task. Nevertheless, there are some general features of God that we can aspire to.

The perfection of God is, first of all, to be Spirit; therefore, to imitate His perfection is to become spiritual as much as possible by detachment from all created things, achieving that freedom of which Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort spoke: “free: souls raised above this earth like heavenly dew who, without impediment, fly to and fro in accordance with the breath of the Holy Spirit. It was they, in part, Your Prophets spoke of when they asked: *Who are these that fly as clouds?* [Is. 60:8]. *Wherever the spirit would go, they went* [Ez 1:12]” (*The Fiery Prayer for the Apostles of the Latter Times*).

The Father’s perfection consists in being God; thus, to imitate His perfection is to let oneself be divinized by Him as much as is possible; it is to live His very life, which we receive through participation by means of the sanctifying grace that He infuses in our hearts.

The Father’s perfection is to give Himself whole and entire; therefore, to imitate His perfection is to set off on the path to the total gift of oneself.

Jesus says: “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him” (Jn 4:23). *These are the ones that He seeks to have worship Him.* The perfection that Jesus Christ demands of us in order to be like the heavenly Father is to live “in spirit and truth,” that is, explains Saint Thom-

as, in “the fervor of love [and in] the truth of faith” (*Commentary on Saint John*). The Father wants His Adorers, His children, to be transformed by the truth (which comes to us through faith in the Truth revealed by God the Father) and pierced by love.

By means of these two virtues, we resemble the Father who is Love and Truth.

8.

A Father who sees in secret

“Your Father who sees in secret will repay you. . . . Your Father
who sees in secret will repay you.”

(Mt 6:4, 6).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses the expression “in secret” six times in reference to the deep realm of the Father’s action.

What is *secret* is the depths of the soul, the profound nucleus of heart and of conscience.

The Father is there; He hears and He acts. Saint Augustine left a writing regarding his own experience: “Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created

things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace” (*Confessions*, Bk. 7).

God is everywhere, but in many of those places we find, in addition to God, so many other things that aren’t Him: things, people, noise, traps, temptations, etc.

In the depths of the soul, in the most profound heart of conscience, only God is there. No one else can enter there except its owner and Creator.

There man is alone with God.

That presence of God in the depths of conscience is not a threatening presence except for the person who has willfully lived a bad life. For the rest, He is there in order “to repay” (Mt 6:4), “to listen” (Mt 6:6), and “to see” (Mt 6:18).

It is a consolation to know that God the Father is always available for the one who wants to seek Him within himself.

However, that God hidden in our interior is not simply our “inner self.” Many psychologists today speak of the “interior god,” but not in reference to the transcendent God who penetrates and is within the depths of the soul. They mean ourselves; according to what they think, within me I find God for the simple

reason that I find myself there and I (they affirm in a pantheist way) *am God*. There are more than a few who distort Jesus' words so that they sound like they affirm this.

However, that's not what Jesus taught. For Him, God is distinct from man and even if every man and woman bears the image of God, even when in the state of sin, God doesn't come in person to anyone but the one who loves Him; and the one who loves Him is the one who keeps His commandments, that is, the one who lives in grace. Some people don't find God within their hearts, because the Father isn't there in them since, as Saint John says: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn 2:15).

"Whoever remains in love," teaches the Beloved Apostle, "remains in God and God in him" (1 Jn 4:16).

God is not in those who walk the wrong path; thus, He is not in the one who doesn't live "as He lived" (cf. 1 Jn 2:6). Perhaps such a one feels God's presence in another way: the accusation of their own conscience because of the culpable absence of God.

When God is not in the center of the soul, entering into its depths can be a dangerous activity. To enter into the secrets of the soul without purifying them with penance and the confession of sins is to lower oneself into a basement that is empty, or, rather, filled with evil spirits.

However, God doesn't remove Himself from a soul except from the one who kicks Him out: "we will remain in Him." No matter where we find ourselves, we can enter into that temple of

intimacy and know that we are seen and heard by a God who is a Father.

Moreover, Jesus makes it understood that God must be sought in secret. “Go to your inner room” (Mt 6:6): hide your fasting, your prayer, etc., from others.

The Father wants to be sought in secret, in silence, in interior peace, in the still of the night.

We won’t find Him in the noise, in the street, in the tumult, in many words, or in showing off.

We are never alone.

“You are seeking God, dear sister, and He is everywhere. Everything proclaims Him to you, everything reveals Him to you, everything brings Him to you. He is by your side, over you, around and in you. Here is His dwelling and yet you still seek Him. Ah! You are searching for God, the idea of God in His essential being. You seek perfection and it lies in everything that happens to you—your suffering, your actions, your impulses are the mysteries under which God reveals Himself to you. But He will never disclose Himself in the shape of that exalted image to which you so vainly cling” (J. P. de Causade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*).

9.

An attentive Father

“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him”

(Mt 6:8).

Our Father knows us better than we know ourselves.

Jesus’ words teach us that God the Father isn’t like those earthly parents who are unaware of what is happening to their children.

Along with the heroic and saintly fathers and mothers who have gigantic hearts, there also abound, unfortunately, parents who are absent from their homes, or those who, although present, are inattentive to the needs and problems of their children who seem like decorative vases. There are many parents who have become not only unable to glimpse or guess the concerns, doubts, and confusions of their children, but also and even have become deaf and blind to the problems that they explicitly bring up.

This is the daily bread of our society without sincere, wholehearted parents, those who bring a child into the world but leave without giving life to the heart and soul within that child, as if being a parent allowed them to separate those two consecutive moments of child's complete birth. "Giving birth" must not be confused with "being a parent." The first is primarily a biological function held in common with the other animals; the second is a spiritual mission, in which men and women participate from God, from whom "comes all fatherhood" ("all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights"—Jas 1:17—including fatherhood).

For this reason, it's painful to hear the anguished cries of so many children who try to call the attention of their indifferent parents: with rebelliousness, dubious approaches to life, isolation, forays into the world of drugs, sex, homosexuality, alcohol, witchcraft and magic, hallucinatory rock, and bad companions who offer a welcoming atmosphere that they didn't find in their families. Certainly, there are exceptions.

Without denying the responsibility that the children and youth who have gotten involved up to their necks in this mess have, we cannot hide the sad truth that teaches us that, in many cases, these situations began as desperate cries for attention to a father or mother who was "absorbed" or "distracted" in "their things," in their problems, in their own plans and worries.

In contrast, Jesus presents the heavenly Father as "attentive beforehand": "He knows before you ask Him."

No one can know what we need before we ask for it, unless they know us very well and they are extremely attentive to the smallest movements of our souls.

Jesus even adds that God is not only a Father who knows our needs, but also a Father who wants to give us what we need.

“God’s silence” (a terrible trial for all men and women) shouldn’t be interpreted as ignoring, neglect, indifference, or a lack of concern. Jesus Christ’s words do not allow us even so much as to think that without staining our lips with a blasphemy. For this reason, on our part we must have confidence, assurance, peace, and tranquility.

Those who have had good and generous fathers easily rise (if they want, since there are also exceptions) to knowledge of the heavenly Father. But what an error (usually involuntary) of those who forge the image they have of God in light of imperfect or bad fatherly images, which also happens in this life!

Of course, God knows “what we need,” but that doesn’t always coincide with what we *think* we need. Without the possibility of any error, He knows our true needs (some of which we ourselves don’t know or don’t know how to express!), while often when we say “I need,” that expression really means: “I believe I need,” or “I desire,” or “I would like.” God doesn’t always respond to our whims or unfounded desires (even when we ask Him), but He always responds with what we truly need.

10.

What the Father wants us to ask Him

“This is how you are to pray: Our Father . . .”

(Mt 6:9-13).

Jesus teaches that our Heavenly Father wants to be interpellated, that is, He wants us to ask Him for things. It’s by means of Jesus Himself that the Father teaches us what to ask for and how.

The most perfect summary is found in the Our Father. For this reason so many saints have offered admirable commentaries on it (Augustine, Cyprian, Thomas Aquinas, Teresa, etc.).

First and foremost, the Our Father teaches us that God the Father wants us to go to Him, and that we should have recourse to Him in all of our needs. Hence, in this prayer there is a list of all the things that we could need: material goods (summarized in bread), spiritual things (to order our relationship with God, to

receive His forgiveness, to learn to forgive, etc.). All of our temporal and eternal needs are contained there (it asks for salvation, eternity, the Kingdom of God). Our sins are there, which we ask God to forgive us for, and our enemy, the devil—the Evil One—from whom we must be freed.

Above all, it educates us in the order of love (the Our Father “orders” charity in us). Thus, it teaches us:

1st To recall that we are God’s children: “Our Father, who art in heaven.”

2nd That we are *of* God and for *God*, created to glorify God: “hallowed be Thy name.”

3rd That the things of God should matter more to us than the things of earth: “Thy Kingdom come.”

4th That what really matters is God’s will: “Thy will be done.”

5th That we have material and spiritual needs, but that these come only after God: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

6th That it is necessary to return to God’s friendship and to peace with our brothers and sisters: “Forgive us . . . as we forgive.”

7th In short, that only with His help can we be freed from the demonic danger: “Deliver us from evil.”

The Our Father highlights that our desire for God (His Kingdom, His will, His honor) must be set before our own material and spiritual concerns. It reminds us that we are not made for ourselves but rather we are from God and for God.

Our prayer is not well made when charity is disordered.

“Why doesn’t God hear my prayers, if I ask Him for good things?” Yes, sometimes we ask for good things (work, health for our loved ones, the conversion of a sinner, and the like) but perhaps we’re not interested in the things of God. There are other good things that should be desired and asked for *before* those things that we usually make petitions for. The young man who asks a girl to fill the emptiness of his life by marrying him doesn’t ask for anything bad; however, it would be a very imperfect expression of true love. If he loved her with a true love, he would’ve asked, rather, for permission to “take care” of her life and her needs; this is because true love first thinks of giving and then in asking. That is the difference between an ordered love and a love without order.

And me? Do I ask God that His will be done in me and in the world? Do I recognize God as a Father and do I confess that His Name and His Honor are more important to me than my bread or my forgiveness?

Do I ask Him not to delay in bringing about His Kingdom, even when this means the end of my temporal plans?

Probably not! James had a point: “You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly” (James 4:3).

Lord, teach us to pray!

Saint Francis of Assisi made this marvelous interpretation of the Lord’s prayer:

“*Our Father* most holy, our Creator and Redeemer, our Savior and our Comforter.

Who art in heaven: in the angels and the saints, giving them light to know you, since you, Lord, are light; setting them afire to love you, since you, Lord, are love; dwelling in them and giving them fullness of joy, since you, Lord, are the supreme, eternal good, and all good comes from you.

Hallowed be Thy Name: may we grow to know you better and better and so appreciate the extent of your favors, the scope of your promises, the sublimity of your majesty, and the profundity of your judgments.

Thy Kingdom come: so that you may reign in us by your grace, and bring us to your kingdom, where we shall see you clearly, love you perfectly and, happy in your company, enjoy you forever.

Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven: so that we may love you with all our heart, by always having you in mind; with all our soul, by always longing for you; with all our mind, by determining to seek your glory in everything; and with all our strength, of body and soul, by lovingly serving you alone. May we love our neighbors as ourselves, and encourage them all to love you, by bearing our share in the joys and sorrows of others, while giving offense to no one.

Give us this day our daily bread: your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may remember and appreciate how much He loved us, and everything He said and did and suffered.

And forgive us our trespasses: in your immeasurable mercy, by virtue of the passion of your Son, and through the intercession of Mary, and all your saints.

As we forgive those who trespass against us: and if we do not forgive perfectly, Lord, make us forgive perfectly, so that, for love of you, we may really forgive our enemies, and fervently pray to you for them, returning no one evil for evil, but trying to serve you in everyone.

And lead us not into temptation: be it hidden or obvious, sudden or persistent.

But deliver us from evil: past, present, or future.”

11.

A Provident Father

“Do not worry”
(Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:22-31).

This phrase is found in what is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful passages of the Gospel. “Do not worry” (Mt 6:25, 31); “Why are you anxious?” (Mt 6:28); “Do not worry” (Mt 6:34). In ten verses Jesus uses the verb “worry” four times, commanding us to distance ourselves from that bad sentiment in our lives.

The reason that He furnishes for His command is simple: there is Another who is concerned; that Other is our Father.

That Father is the one who “knows that you need” things (Mt 6:32) and what things we need: to eat, to drink, to be clothed (and behind these expressions we should see all the other needs that men and women have).

We will receive those things, “they will be given us” (Mt 6:33), or rather, they will come from the Father’s hand, although not in an extraordinary way—by means of an angel or falling from heaven—but by means of the channels that Providence has prepared and that, in general, are “other people,” that is, our neighbors (in the same way that we ourselves are Providence’s instruments for other people).

The proof that Jesus provides is something that we can also grasp through our experience: God, the heavenly Father, feeds the birds of the sky who do not sow nor reap nor gather anything into barns. No one is dressed in such beauty as the lilies of the field; God dresses them. They do not work or sew: it is God who gives them that beauty.

Aren’t we worth much more than birds and flowers? “Are not you more important than [the birds of the sky]?” (Mt 6:26). “Will He not much more provide for you?” (Mt 6:30).

Trust in Providence puts our faith to the test.

Jesus calls the one who doesn’t trust a “man of little faith,” (Mt 6:30) and He sets him on the same level as the pagans (cf. Mt 6:32).

As is evident in all the other pages of the Gospel, Jesus doesn’t invite us to sloth or to laziness. He commands us to work, and He Himself gave an example of this; this is what the disciples understood to such a degree that Saint Paul said to the false providentialists: “if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat!”

Trust in the Father's providence does not exclude tiring work (both in the material realm as well as what must be done in our souls). It does, however, exile the thought that our hands will give us everything that we need; it prevents us from thinking that we are self-sufficient.

“Unless the Lord build the house,
they labor in vain who build.
Unless the Lord guard the city,
in vain does the guard keep watch. . . .
All this God gives to his beloved in sleep”

(Ps 127)

We need much more than our hands, that is, our own efforts, can give us.

However, God wants to give these things to us only in the measure that we need them.

“The Lord knows what we need.” Nonetheless, He takes on our concerns with one condition: that we put all our efforts into seeking His kingdom and His justice (cf. Mt 6:33), that is, Himself (that is His kingdom) and our sanctification. Only then do we “unbind” the hands of His Providence.

God never lies, and He never fails to fulfill what He promises.

12.

A Father who shows Himself to the simple

“I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will”

(Lk 10:21-22; cf. Mk 11:25-27).

Jesus exults and blesses the Father for His designs, which are at once salvific and most wise (cf. Lk 10:21). He calls those designs the Father’s “gracious will”: His eternal and benevolent will. It is a salvific will, since the Father reveals Himself, opening His mysteries, in order to save us. The truth saves: it heals the intellect from error, it shows the good to the will, and it attracts towards its true perfection.

No one can save themselves, that is, reach the door to Heaven, reach God, without knowing where that door is and what it consists of, or what boat can take us there. From here it follows that the revelation of the end (the Trinity and the beatific vision) and the means (the Incarnate Son, the Church that continues His work, the sacraments) is an act that shows forth God's will to save: the good will of God. God loves us and attracts us towards Himself.

However, His revelation is bound to a law of absolutely divine wisdom: it shines upon the "little ones" and it is hidden from the "great." In other words, it is revealed to those who know and acknowledge that they are little, and hidden from those who think that they are great.

It can't be any other way: the revelation of the truth can only be received by those who live the truth and from the truth.

The little ones are neither children nor the poor. These serve as metaphors for littleness, but a little one could be either a child or an adult or an elderly person, poor or rich. The littleness that attracts the divine action is an attribute of the heart that can be found in any person, of any age, of any condition. Such a one is *humble* in the moral sense of the term: the one who recognizes that "God is God" and that we "need God," that is, they understand that without God they are worthless and can't do anything. They are those who know that all the good that they have they have received, and that which they are lacking they can hope to receive from God, because He is good and generous. They are like chil-

dren who know that they are loved by their parents. This *is* the truth of our nature and of our existence; for this reason, God opens the treasure of *all* truth to those who acknowledge this truth.

Neither are the “great” to be identified with the rich, with the powerful, or with adults. Perhaps there are more “great” ones among these groups than among those who are materially in need, but even among these there are people to be counted among those whom Jesus reproaches here. The great and the powerful are the self-sufficient, the rebels, the proud, those of harsh judgments, those who scorn God and their neighbor; also included are those who have such a high opinion of themselves that they don’t forgive those who criticize or humiliate them; the ignorant who believe they don’t need anyone to teach them (among whom there are many who are poisoned by their erudition and far from some elemental truths, such as the truth about themselves, about their origin, and about their final destiny); in short, those who make themselves “their own teacher,” those who Saint Bernard rightfully calls “disciples of a fool.” They all live a lie: their thoughts about themselves and about God are erroneous, and they are, to a large degree, attached to their error.

Among these we undoubtedly find some of the powerful of this world, the worldly wise, and professionals in religion and in the sciences of the world. However, pride can also be nested in the day laborers and workers, in beggars and shoe shiners. For many poor people, their poverty doesn’t teach them the truth about

human limitations, but rather, on the contrary, it gives them ground to become bitter at life and at God, and in this sense they are not “little,” but rather think, act, and feel like those “great evil ones.”

Those who live under the cover and locked behind the shell of pride and error will never see the shining sun of truth.

Moreover, they can let that sun shine without letting it shine for them. Pride is a very serious danger for the faith, and it easily leads to doubts about the faith, heresy, and apostasy, as history (and perhaps our own personal experience) teaches us. All pride shipwrecks in something.

The Father, however, will never deny the truth if a person wants to break their bitter shell.

13.

A Father with a face

“Their angels in heaven always look upon [His] face”

(Mt 18:10).

The complete phrase of Jesus is: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.”

This time, the little ones that Jesus is referring to really are children, because this phrase culminates a series of teachings where children occupy the heart of His thought: “He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said” (Mt 18:2-3). However, it concerns an invitation for all of us to become “like them”: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

Let’s see here: is it that a person’s dignity comes from having as a guardian a being who sees God the Father face to face? It’s

undeniable that part of a person's dignity comes from this fact, but, as I understand it, this isn't what Jesus wants to teach us here. It doesn't seem to me that He is limiting Himself to saying that the dignity of the one protected is measured by the greatness of the protector and this, in turn, on account of their familiarity with the heavenly Father. This is like a childish boast: "My uncle is the commander of the Swiss Guard." Yes, but if I'm a rascal the fact that my uncle defends the Pope doesn't do anything for me.

For this reason, Jesus meant to say that the angels act as the *bridge* between the Blessed Face and the heart of those protected and that, accordingly, the Light of the Divine Face bathes the heart of each one of His children. Such is the mission of the angels: to elevate, bring, and present the prayers of earth in heaven, and to lower and to take the gifts of heaven down to earth, as Jacob observed in his vision of the angelic ladder (Gn 28:12-13).

Jesus knew very well the Apostles' desire to see the Father's face: "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us" (Jn 14:8), Philip asks. And it couldn't be any other way, since they were true and faithful disciples of Moses of whom it was written:

"Then Moses said, 'Please let me see your glory!' The Lord answered: 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim my name, 'Lord,' before you; I who show favor to whom I will, I who grant mercy to whom I will. But you cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live. Here, continued the Lord, is a place near me where you shall station yourself on the rock. When my glory passes I will set you in the cleft of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I

have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face may not be seen” (Ex 33:18-23).

Moses wanted to see God’s face, which no mortal can contemplate without dying first; in contrast, and as a stupendous grace, God shows him “His back.”

God’s holiness is immense. Moses (Ex 3:6), Elijah (1 Kgs 19:13), and the very seraphim (Is 6:2) cover their faces before it. However, this does not prevent it from being our deepest desire:

“Come,” says my heart, “seek his face”;
your face, Lord, do I seek!
Do not hide your face from me;
do not repel your servant in anger.

(Ps 27:8-9).

Perhaps, as some say, the psalmist’s phrase only expresses the desire to be near God. However, the Psalms are the experiences of every human heart, and our *I want to see God’s face* in the most literal sense.

Hence, the angels give us reflections of that Face of Unreachable Beauty, of Unthinkable Goodness. If one can’t “see it and live,” it’s because the heart is too narrow in this life. It’s too much goodness for such a little heart.

It consoles us to know that the Father’s Face is our door. What our heart asks for has not only a happy ending, but also a *real* one.

Jesus has given us a foretaste: “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”

Whoever sees Jesus cannot stop loving Him.

Whoever sees the Father—through the mirror which is Jesus Christ—remains fixed in love; and because of that love one day they will remain fixed eternally in a vision so intense, so profound, so impressive, that it will transform, mold, and change us: “we shall be like him, for we shall *see* him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2).

14.

A Father who forgives us, but demands that we forgive others

“So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart”

(Mt 18:35).

This is the final phrase of the parable of the “unforgiving servant” (Mt 18:23-35), the one who, having been forgiven an enormous and unpayable debt by his king, later throws one of his companions into jail for a debt of a few coins. When the king finds out, he backpedals on his forgiveness and imprisons him as a punishment for his lack of mercy: “until he should back back what he owes.”

The parable has two possible focal points: the merciless servant, and the king who is very compassionate and has a great sense of justice.

That king is the image of God the Father: “So will *my heavenly Father* do to you.”

“Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful,” Jesus teaches (Lk 6:36). Saint Paul names Him with a marvelous expressions: “Father of mercies.” The Apostle exclaims: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction. . . . For as Christ’s sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow” (2 Cor 1:3-4). This is because He, like the father of the prodigal son in the parable, “was filled with compassion” (Lk 15:20).

God the Father has an infinite compassion for men, to the point of being able to forgive them, as the parable says, *ten thousand talents*. The “talent” was worth seventy minae, or six thousand Attic drachmas or denarii; since the denarius was the daily wage for a day laborer (Mt 20:1), a talent was equivalent to six thousand days of labor, and ten thousand talents would be sixty million days: the whole salary of 165,000 years. In other words, Jesus describes a debt that is *absolutely unpayable*, as are our debts with God—the metaphor doesn’t refer to anything else; these debts are so great that not even our belongings or our very lives would be enough to pay them off.

The servant’s injustice in the parable is flagrant. When the king’s compassion pardoned a debt of sixty million days’ wages, avoiding slavery, the servant sent his companion to jail for owing the wages of one hundred days (0.00016% of what he was forgiv-

en!), which symbolizes the immense difference between human-divine debts (between men and God) and human-human debts (among mere mortals).

We know the outcome of the parable, which paints a very good picture of the combination of Divine mercy and justice, which we can express with this principle: “God is infinitely merciful with us but He demands, with strict justice, that we be very compassionate with others.”

Through the outcome of the parable, it’s shown that God’s mercy can become the most serious accusation for the one who is hard of heart. In other words, God establishes a “law of mercy”:

1st He is infinitely merciful, and He pardons us without measure.

2nd He awaits our imitation of His gesture (an imitation made towards our debtors).

3rd However, if we show hardness of heart towards our neighbor instead of compassion. . .

4th . . . then God will also repay us by imitating our attitude: “the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you,” He said, anticipating this conclusion.

All this means to say that, in the final analysis, it falls to our free choice to cooperate in His mercy towards us or to reject it.

For the king, who is the Father, shows—and here begins not only the parable but also the personal history of every person—an attitude of infinite compassion . . . if we want to accept it.

15.

A Father who hears the prayers that come in the name of His Son

“Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”

(Mt 18:19-20).

Jesus “assures” us that the Father hears the prayers that have certain characteristics: when they are made in community (“if two or three”) and that what is asked for is always done in union of hearts (they “agree on earth”).

The reason behind this is that, in that situation (“gathered in His name”), it is Jesus who is in the midst of them.

The reading—and even more the exposition—of these passages place us in some difficulty, because we can guess the objection that will be raised: “we’ve done that and we didn’t get what we asked for.” It’s a hard and frequent objection, one that is generally uttered with suffering and bitterness.

But Jesus neither lies nor makes a mistake; therefore, strictly speaking, what He says must be true. On the other hand, we can imagine that some of those listening to Jesus Himself would have made the same objection, since He was surrounded by very needy people: the sick, paupers, lepers, the unemployed, beggars, men and women with many children, parents, spouses, siblings, the hungry, etc. Upon hearing those words that are so full of hope, they would have put into practice the “formula.” And if it didn’t work, it’s probable that they would have complained to Jesus; thus, if the Lord had exaggerated, He would have had to correct or modify His words in the face of the first criticisms, and it’s likely that the Gospel would report this in more nuanced terms. Nevertheless, we don’t find a single attenuation of His sayings for the simple reason that Jesus never modified the strength of the promise that *He made in the name of His Father*.

Furthermore, he said, “if two of you agree on earth *about anything* [*de omni re quacumque petierint*] for which they are to pray,” and then added apodictically: “it shall be granted to them.”

The reason for this, let us repeat, is because Jesus becomes present in the midst of those who pray in His name, and, there-

fore, He is the one who asks, and His prayer is infallible. The Father always listens to the Son.

However, it's also true that the personal experience of many is that often they don't receive what they ask for: where, then, is the problem?

The failures must come from somewhere else.

Perhaps what we're missing is the "mutual agreement" that the Lord speaks of, since He doesn't mean that we must simply ask "together," but rather "setting hearts at unison" (this is what *agree* means) in such a way that charity rules. If charity doesn't rule, could Jesus Christ really be in their midst?

Or perhaps we misunderstand this asking "for anything." This is a hyperbole that the Lord Himself took the time to clarify by teaching about the things that we should ask for in the Our Father. If we join together to ask the Father that we might win the lottery, He's not obligated to grant it; indeed, He has a great number of reasons not to hear many of our requests. We've already spoken about the Our Father; it contains a list of the things that we should ask for and the way in which our prayer should be ordered.

It could also be that the problem is linked with the interpretation of that expression: "it will be granted." Jesus promises that it will be granted, but He doesn't say *when* nor *how*. For some, who are used to obtain everything immediately, this might seem to water down the Lord's promise, but, nonetheless, it's not something accidental. God is God. Therefore, His reality cannot be cut down

to a “magical” idea of reduced divinity that is, in essence, a sort of genie like that in Aladdin’s lamp; he only had to rub it in order to obtain everything he desired.

On the contrary, Jesus teaches that: 1st the Father always listens when He sees His Son’s charity in the hearts of those who come together to pray; 2nd that the prayer always efficacious, although it might also be mysterious and therefore produce its fruits mysteriously; 3rd He invites us to trust, to know how to listen, and to acknowledge that oftentimes God’s reply is much better than we had hoped for.

Saint Therese of Lisieux wrote: “Oh my God, You have surpassed all my expectations.”

16.

A Father who gives everything over to His Son

“The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him”

(Jn 3:35; cf 5:19-20).

This is one of the fundamental verses for understanding Christ’s royal dignity: by the Father’s will, everything “has been given over” to the Son, that is, everything is under His power, everything is in His hands: “My Father . . . has given them [souls] to me” (Jn 10:29); “Fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power” (Jn 13:3); “Just as you gave [the Son] authority over all people” (Jn 17:2).

On another occasion the Lord said: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father” (Lk 10:22).

Also: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father . . . has given them to me” (Jn 10:28-29).

In many other ways, He leads us to understand this same truth: “Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mt 26:53); “I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me” (Lk 22:29).

We are in the Son’s hands, as something that belongs to Him, as part of what has been given to Him. But God gives to the Son what He wants the Son to save, what the Father doesn’t want to be lost:

“I give them eternal life,
and they shall never perish.

No one can take them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,
and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand.

The Father and I are one”

(Jn 10:28-30).

This “having been set” in the Son’s hands shows the Father’s saving will. We have been set “on the heights, with fortresses of rock for stronghold, food and drink in steady supply,” as Isaiah says (33:16). The Son’s hands—which are the Father’s, the hands that carry out the Father’s designs—imply *security*. Precisely so that our enemy—the devil—might know that no one can overcome

us, the Father—from whom no one can snatch away anything—sets us in an impregnable defense: “all the saints are in Your hand,” He says in the Old Testament (Dt 33:3, Douay-Rheims).

The Father is a Father who loves us with an eternal and irrevocable love. For this very reason, it is something mysterious for us, since we don’t know how to love with an eternal love or with a fidelity tested by all classes of infidelity.

It’s difficult for us to bring together this “infinite certainty” of salvation—that no one and nothing can take us out of the Son’s hand and out of the Father’s hand—with the *fear* with which we should work out our salvation (Phil 2:12). Both are truths of faith; they don’t contradict one another, but are rather united in a synthesis that is too high for our lowly sights.

However, there is a sure, firm, and undeniable truth: the Father loves us as something that is His, and He has set us in His hands and in the hands of His Son. As the prophet says: “See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you” (Is 49:16). Our names are never erased from there.

How good does that consoling phrase of confident men and women sound when we consider it in light of this truth: “We are in God’s hands”!

To be in God’s hands is to be in the best of hands.

“I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Ps 23: 4).

17.

A Father who draws

“No one can come to me unless the Father who
sent me draw him”
(Jn 6:44).

To go to Jesus is a grace.

A person goes to Him when he or she believes in Him with a living faith, meaning, when he or she accepts Him and loves Him. Hence, a soul goes to Jesus when he or she really and truly converts.

Among other things, *to believe* means “to go.” The Latin expression, “*crédere in Deum*,” which completes the three aspects of faith according to Saint Augustine (along with “*crédere Deo*”—to believe the God who testifies—and “*crédere Deum*”—to believe in the mystery of God and everything that He has revealed—) means precisely “to believe *moving towards* God.”

Likewise, there is a “*crédere in Iesum*”: to accept Him with our minds and at the same time to move ourselves towards Him with our hearts. In Sacred Scripture, the acceptance of God and of Jesus, the “faith,” is something *supernatural* and *total*, meaning, not only intellectual but also, and at the same time, willful and affective. If it were any other way, what would distinguish us from the demon who said to Christ: “I know who you are—the Holy One of God” (Mk 1:24)? What good does it do us to accept that Jesus is God in our minds if we keep our hearts far from Him?

However, the intellect accepts the Truth of Christ because the will moves it to (since it concerns an act of intellectual submission to a truth that isn’t evident to us, even though, in itself, that truth is overwhelmingly evident), and, at the same time, the will can do this because grace elevates it and applies it to that singular desire.

This grace which moves the will to produce that “desire to believe” is called the “*gratia Patris*”: the grace of the Father. It is a moving and applicative grace. It doesn’t come from us but rather from God, as Jesus told Peter: “For flesh and blood has not revealed [*that is, this is not some merely human knowledge*] this [*the divine mystery of Christ*] to you, but my heavenly Father” (Mt 16:17).

We, too, have accepted Christ (His life and His teachings). Hence, we have been moved by the Father: “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father” (Jn 6:65).

It is the Father who has led us to the source of living waters.

It is the Father who has revealed His Son, who has filled us with the wonder of Christ, who has drawn us towards Christ, who has convinced about Christ, who has made us fall in love with Christ, who has made us receive and accept Christ, and who has changed us into other Christs.

The Father has begotten us in Christ. Saint Paul bears witness to this: “He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world. . . . He destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ” (Ep 1:4-5). The subject of both of those verbs is the Father.

In his Gospel, Saint John puts the same idea in Jesus’ mouth, although with different words: “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me” (Jn 6:37).

The Father has innumerable ways of *drawing*, of bringing souls to Christ, of *giving* souls to His Son.

For example, He does it by means of spiritual seduction, stirring up love for Jesus, as happens with the sinful woman who feels drawn by the holiness of the Lord who forgives, and so she throws herself at His feet, weeping over her sins (cf. Lk 7:37-50).

He also does it by means of curiosity: “Who are you?” some ask Him (cf. Jn 8:25); “Rabbi, where are you staying?” (Jn 1:38). The villagers who had heard the testimony of the Samaritan woman and who “went out of the town and came to him” (Jn 4:30) were also moved by curiosity. Perhaps even Herod received these pushes from the Father, since, according to Saint Luke, he asked: “Who then is this about whom I hear such things?” And he kept

trying to see him” (Lk 9:9); however, when he had Christ in front of Him, he spurned Him.

He also produces that drawing by means of encounters that are neither sought after nor intended by us, but that are arranged by Him, as happens to Simon of Cyrene: “they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus” (Lk 23:26); and there he remained, elbow to elbow with that Jesus who would forever associate His Name with his, as Christ’s Cyrenian.

Or, He does it by permitting evils that place us in “need” of Jesus: “A leper came to him [and kneeling down] begged him” (Mk 1:40). Would that leper have come to know Christ if not for his leprosy?

Sometimes it happens without us doing anything on our part; He simply comes to our side and interrupts our life. This has happened to many: “Again he entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand” (Mk 3:1).

It could even happen that it is our enemies who bring us to Jesus: “Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery” (Jn 8:3). The elderly sinners left with empty hands, grinding their teeth, but the woman caught in adultery left with peace in her soul and a life changed, perhaps forever.

Sometimes the Father makes use even of human wisdom, as happened with Nicodemus: “Rabbi, we *know* that you are a teach-

er who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing. . . . ” (Jn 3:2).

Others, in contrast, are brought by those who love them, as was Nathanael, to whom Philip said: “We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets. . . . Come and see” (Jn 1:45-46).

However, behind all of these ways is the Father, who weaves our encounter with Jesus. Sometimes it comes by means of pain and the need to be consoled, other times by love, or loneliness, the search for a Friend, out of despair, and there’s no lack of times when He simply comes into our lives in unexpected ways.

Sometimes that attraction is irresistible, and other times not (as is seen in the case of the rich young man). On our part, it can last until faced with the cross (abandoning it in the most difficult and painful situations), or beyond, sharing His cross and His mission.

However, it is always the Father who brings us, who moves us, and who unites our destiny to that of Jesus.

18.

A Father of preemptive love

“Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me” (Jn 14:21).

“If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love” (Jn 15:10).

Here lies a great mystery that we can express with two formulas: 1st We really only love God truly when we observe His commandments; the one who doesn’t fulfill them does not remain in His love. 2nd However, God’s love for us is not conditioned upon our fulfillment of His commandments; in fact, He loved us even when we didn’t live according to His commandments for, as Saint Paul says, “even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] brought us to life with Christ” (Ep 2:5). He continues by explaining that He did this “because of the great love he had for us” (Ep

2:4). In other places, the same idea is repeated: “we were by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3); “And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds he has now reconciled” (Col 1:21-22).

Without the fulfillment of the commandments, there is no salvation. At the same time, however, God’s love isn’t limited when we cease to fulfill the commandments: He continues offering it, He calls us, and He pursues us:

Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy. . . .
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.
Whether man’s heart or life it be which yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
Be dunged with rotten death?

The father in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15) continues loving the son, even when the son doesn’t do the father’s will and betrays his love. The father waits for him, he longs for him, and, in a certain sense, he draws him with his love.

This is because a true father doesn’t seek to save his son only when the son is a *good* one. He always wants to save him, because the son will always be his *son*. Does he share his blood, has he been begotten by him, does he bear his image? That’s enough. Is he a bad son? Even if he is, the father will be a good father!

We must fulfill the commandments; we can't be saved if we don't. However, God loves us not only *because* and not only *when* we fulfill His commandments, but rather *because we are His children*; if God only loved us when we fulfilled the commandments, He would abandon sinners. Fortunately, even when we are bad children, we continue being children, and we can await His forgiveness with confidence; we shouldn't, however, play around with the time: in that train to heaven, there's a seat for me that my Father has already paid for, but if I wait too long, I can be left at the station without getting on the train.

Maybe it's for this reason that a religious who despaired of her salvation because she had been unfaithful to the divine commandments was greatly helped when her confessor reminded her of this great truth: "Sister, if God wants to save you, it's because you're His daughter, in spite of the fact that you might not be a *good* daughter." It's from this *paternal salvific will* that the Father's inclination to help us return to Him and to help us fulfill the commandments is born. We must not confuse *our love for God* (which is shown in the fulfillment of the commandments) and *God's love for us*, which is prior to and above and beyond our fulfillment of the commandments.

It's true that we seek God, but it's even truer that God seeks us: "He first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19).

His love is preemptive, prior to and greater than ours. We can impede its effect on us (just as we can block the rain by hiding under an umbrella), but we can't destroy that love (just as an um-

rella doesn't make the rain stop). And God can always cause a gale that pulls away the umbrella.

19.

A Father who dignifies us by making us His children

“He called God his own father, making himself equal to God”

(Jn 5:18).

Saint John explains that this—calling God “his own” father—was the principal motive why Jesus’ enemies sought to kill Him, even more than His transgressions of the Sabbath rest (cf. Jn 5:17).

By calling God “Father,” Jesus made Himself equal to God. There are ontological reasons for this. Filiation implies receiving the nature and dignity of the other—that of the one who begets: every child comes from their father, participating in his nature. Jesus is the Son of the Father *by nature*.

However, Jesus also teaches us to call ourselves “children of God,” and to call God “our Father.” Since His word is “effica-

cious” (meaning, it brings about what it says), it’s clear that the Lord really grants it, meaning, He “effectively makes us children of God.” Saint John underlines this forcefully: “We may be called the children of God. Yet so we are” (1 Jn 3:1).

All men *feel* the need to have a divine Father, even those who make idols, as Jeremiah says: “They say to a piece of wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth’” (Jer 2:27). For the ancient Greeks, Zeus shows his fatherhood both in benevolence as well as in anger and malice. In the *Odyssey* we read: “Father Zeus, of all gods you are the most malicious. We are your own children, yet you show us no mercy in all our misery and afflictions.”

Jesus surpasses all purely human and mythological expectations and tells us that God, the true God, infinite and omnipotent, is our Father, and that that fatherhood is not just a consoling metaphor but rather *the reality*.

This is the main source of our dignity: we participate in the divine nature that we receive through grace: sanctifying grace makes us God’s children. In a certain sense, it makes us “equal” to God, gods by participation: “you [have] come to share in the divine nature,” says Saint Peter (2 Pe 1:4).

What or who can take man’s greatness from him, if it’s founded on the filial relationship with God the Father?

Men can consider themselves or actually become dregs, trash, or broken. Others can scorn us, set us aside, step on us, deprive us of our freedom, or even of our lives . . . but no one can take

our divine filiation from us, nor deprive us of our heavenly Father, unless we ourselves separate ourselves from Him by sin.

What am I? What are you? More than anything else, more than being a man or woman, a priest or lay person or consecrated person, more than the place I hold in society, I am defined—and you are defined—as a child of God.

First, I am a children of God; then, I am everything else. Our filiation supports all the other privileges and offices. We can never despair if we recall our dignity as children of God.

The prodigal son remembered it. Even though he had lost his social standing, his money, his chastity, his dignity as a man, coarsened among the animals, he never forgot that he was a *son*: “I shall get up and go to my *father*. . . . I shall say to him, ‘Father.’” His awareness of being a son (albeit one with vices) emerges above and beyond his misery as a sinner. Even though he later says, “I no longer *deserve* to be called your son,” he doesn’t say, “I’m not your son.”

We don’t deserve it but—in the divine mystery—we are.

20.

A Father who blesses

“Come, you who are *blessed* by my Father”

(Mt 25:34).

Many experienced exorcists consider the cases of presumed diabolic possessions that have their origin in a father’s or mother’s curse of their child as especially serious. Although it might seem horrible, there are parents who curse the son or daughter who deceived, defrauded, betrayed, or abandoned them. That act can have tragic consequences for the cursed person. The same effects aren’t seen when the curse is uttered by people who are not connected by bonds of blood.

Why is this the case? Perhaps because the father and the mother (and all other ancestors) are not only the channels of life, but also of divine blessing, the blessing that God gave in paradise and that remains linked to the all descendants according to the

flesh: “God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply” (Gn 1:28). Fertility is the link that should bring the blessings of the fruitful Father, the creator of all things, to each newly begotten child.

Man should bless others because he is the image of God (cf. Gn 1:27), who is “Blessed,” and the “One who Blesses.”

Indeed, Jesus called the chosen with this qualifier, which also has the strength of a proper name: “the blessed by my Father.”

Every blessing comes from God. Saint Paul says that He showers us with blessings: “[He] has blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (Ep 1:3). The divine blessing envelopes us and transforms us. The “divine favor,” “God’s blessing,” unlike the human one, has a transforming efficacy: when God blesses, man’s heart is re-created. The “*kejaritome*” (full of grace and blessing), as the angel calls Mary, is a clear witness to this truth: God’s *favor* is not extrinsic to the creature upon which it rests, but rather penetrates it as light goes through glass, making it luminous and holy.

In this sense, then, there are no words more terrible than those that Jesus places in the mouth of the Supreme Judge and that concern those who persevere in their sins until death; He will tell them: “Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). God’s curse turns us over to the devil to whom the sinner himself has sold himself to because of his sin!

We must ask our Father for the grace to be one of His blessed; a grace that He *wants* to give us, if we don't resist it.

Don't curse anyone. Bless even your enemies in order to be children of that Father who blesses (cf. Lk 6:27-28).

21.

A generous Father

“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”

(Jn 3:16).

Chapter six of Micah’s prophecy opens with some words that make the skin bristle. He speaks of God’s “case” with His people, and it goes like this:

“Hear, O mountains, the Lord’s case, pay attention, O foundations of the earth! For the Lord has a case against his people; he enters into trial with Israel. My people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! I brought you up from the land of Egypt, from the place of slavery I ransomed you; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”

Christian tradition has been particularly sensitive to these divine complaints, and with them and other Biblical texts it has

composed one of the most emotional fragments of the Christian liturgy, called the “Reproaches,” which begin with these words:

“—My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!

I led you out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom, but you led your Savior to the cross.

— My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!

For forty years I led you safely through the desert. I fed you with manna from heaven, and brought you to a land of plenty; but you led your Savior to the cross.

—My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!

What more could I have done for you? I planted you as my fairest vine, but you yielded only bitterness: when I was thirsty you gave me vinegar to drink, and you pierced your Savior with a lance.

—My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!

“What more could I have done for you?” Hard words and a strong reproach for our cries of constant complaints!

Throughout her toilsome history, Israel experienced first hand that God had only one reason to reveal Himself to her and to choose her from among all the other nations as His own people: the generosity of His limitless love (cf. Dt 4:37; 7:8; 10:15). His prophets never tired of repeating that only out of love did God continue saving her and forgiving her infidelities and sins (cf. Is 43:1-7; Hos 2). It’s a love that is greater than a father has for his son (Hos 11:1), stronger than a mother’s love (Is 49:14-15), more

faithful than a husband for his beloved spouse (Is 62:4-5). It's able to overcome the worst infidelities with forgiveness (Ez 16; Hos 11); however, we can only really have an idea of its extraordinary greatness when we think that He hasn't denied us anything, *not even His only-begotten Son* (cf. Jn 3:16)!

"Though the mountains fall away," says Isaiah, "and the hills be shaken, my love shall never fall away from you" (Is 54:10). Jeremiah says: "With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you" (Jr 31:3).

Only with this background can we begin to understand the overwhelming meaning of Jesus' words at the Last Supper in reference to each and every faithful person: "my Father will love him" (Jn 14:23).

22.

A Father we can abandon ourselves to

“But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides”

(Mt 6:33).

With these words, Jesus speaks to us about the only concern that should occupy our lives: to seek the things of God. For everything else, we should *abandon ourselves to Him*. Said with different words: *Our Father thinks* of everything else.

Saint Peter admonishes us with the same thought: “Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7). The Psalms repeat it incessantly: “Cast your care upon the Lord, who will give you support. He will never allow the righteous to stumble” (Ps 55:23).

To abandon oneself into God's hands consists of completely giving God the rights over one's life, rights over one's plans, thoughts, projects, and desires. It means to be guided not by our *own* sights and intentions, but by God's; it means to seek His will, and to do only His will.

In addition, this abandonment is based on living in the present moment: to see God here and now. It means to ask yourself, "What does He want from me in this very moment?" without concerning ourselves with the past and even less for the future; everything that isn't the present must be left in the hands of Divine Providence. It means to concern ourselves only with love for and obedience to the present will of God (what He wants here and now).

It consists of disposing our own will in such a way as to let ourselves be led by God: to become God's instrument, like a tool that a worker uses for his work. It means welcoming the divine inspirations and motions with fidelity.

The divine will is manifested in two ways. The first is *God's will that has already been expressed* and that we know by means of the Ten Commandments, the natural law, the Church's precepts, the vows and promises that we have made in the right way, the orders of our superiors and elders, by the rules in the place where we live, by our duties of state, etc. Here and now, God wants us to do all of these things. It's not possible to doubt this will; God wants us to live out that Divine will in complete fidelity.

There is, however, another path by which the divine will is revealed: it's called the divine will "of approbation" or "of permission." It consists of those things that aren't contained in the aforementioned rule and that we know that God wants because He permits them to happen each day: illnesses, pains, crosses, joys, etc., and also divine inspirations that are properly discerned. Thus, the youthful missionary knows that God wants him to go preach in this or that place because that's where his superiors sent him, or he understands that God is asking him to abandon the place of his dreams because of some unforeseen difficulty that prevents him from continuing there. The person who falls ill, without any possibility of a cure, knows that God is asking him to carry that cross, etc. This will is never opposed to the previous one; rather, it supposes it and adds new requests from God.

In all things, we must abandon ourselves and accept God's will with complete submission. "There is no way more secure than that of abandonment," writes Fr. J. P. de Caussade, "and none more easy, sweet, clear, and less subject to illusion and error. In it God is loved and all Christian duties fulfilled; the sacraments are frequented, and all the exterior acts of religion which are binding to all are performed. Superiors are obeyed, and the duties of the state of life are discharged; temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil are continually resisted; for none are more on guard, or more vigilant in acquitting themselves of all their obligations, than those who follow this way."

In one of his *Spiritual Conferences*, Saint Francis de Sales writes: “Our Lord loves with a most tender love those who are so happy as to abandon themselves wholly to His fatherly care, letting themselves be governed by His divine providence, without any idle speculations as to whether the workings of this providence will be useful to them, to their profit, or painful to their loss, and this because they are well assured that nothing can be sent, nothing permitted by this paternal and most loving heart, which will not be a source of good and profit to them. All that is required is that they should place all their confidence in Him. . . . When, in fulfilling our daily duties, we abandon everything, our Lord takes care of everything and orders everything. . . . The soul has nothing else to do but to rest in the arms of our Lord like a child on its mother’s breast. When she puts it down to walk, it walks until she takes it up again, and when she wishes to carry it, she is allowed to do so. It neither knows nor thinks where it is going, but allows itself to be carried or led wherever its mother pleases.”

“How clear and luminous this path is! I defend it and I teach it without any fear, and I am sure that everyone understands me when I say that the whole of our sanctification consists in receiving at each moment the pains and duties of our state as veils that conceal from us and give us God Himself” (J. P. de Caussade).

23.

A good Father

“If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him”

(Mt 7:11).

Jesus teaches that His Father is *good*. Undoubtedly, goodness is said of God’s very essence: God, One and Three, is Good; He is Goodness by essence. However, in addition to this more general meaning, Jesus proclaims in a particular way the Goodness of the First Person of the Most Holy Trinity, that is, of His Father: “[The Father] makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Mt 5:45); “your heavenly Father [will] give good things to those who ask him” (Mt 7:11).

This goodness is shown especially in some of His gifts.

The first is *predestination*, meaning the eternal choice that He has made of us. Saint Paul never tires of singing God the Father's goodness, manifested in this extraordinary mercy: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he writes in the Letter to the Ephesians, "who . . . chose us in him, before the foundation of the world. . . . In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will" (Ep 1:3-5). The Father has done this because He is good. Nothing obligated Him to create us. As Psalm 136 says, He has done it "for he is good; for his mercy endures forever."

This is why Saint John writes: "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). He rose early in order to love us before the dawn of the world. He is the Father who, before His children wake up, has already set up everything for them and for their good.

The second gift that He has given us is His Son in the Incarnation. Five centuries before Christ, the Father revealed the Incarnation to the prophet Isaiah with mysterious words, looking towards the future: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace" (Is 9:5). "A child is born to us," "a son is given to us." He is a gift from the Father. Saint John the Evangelist says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). "He so loved." Nothing obligated Him, and even more so for people who were so far removed from Him as we were.

He gave us His Son precisely in order that He might teach us that God the Father is “our Father,” since it is the Son of God who teaches us to pray the most beautiful of prayers and who explains to us that God the Father is also “our Father.”

However, not only did He give us the gift of His Son, but He also gave Him over to death for us. This is the greatest mystery of the Father’s love. Filled with emotion and amazed at the magnitude of this goodness, Saint Paul says: “He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all” (Rm 8:32). If this hadn’t been revealed, we would never have dared to say something like it.

The same Apostle says: “But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. . . . Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rm 5:8-10).

God the Father’s goodness is also revealed to us in the saints. It is by Him that the good are good, because all goodness comes from God. Men and women, even pagans and non-believers, cannot resist goodness and charity. In India, it wasn’t the Catholics, but rather the local government, that sets so many obstacles for the Church, that took the initiative to erect a statue of then-Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, and they took pride in having her as a favorite daughter, in spite of the fact that she was a Catholic nun and a foreigner, because her heroic charity with the poorest of the poor, like the sun, can’t be blocked out by a hand. Who could

deny the resplendent goodness of Saint Louis Orione, or of Saint Joseph Benedict Cottolengo, and of all those who dedicated and who dedicate their lives to the rejected of the world, those from whom many hide their faces: the handicapped, the deformed, the lepers, and the elderly? And from where did they get the strength to be so good if not from the Father to whom they prayed and whom they contemplated? Bossuet said of Saint Vincent, the saint of charity: “How good God must be, since He made Vincent de Paul so good!”

In the Psalms, we find very beautiful prayers that proclaim God’s goodness and generosity with His children:

“How great is your goodness, Lord,
stored up for those who fear you.
You display it for those who trust you,
in the sight of the children of Adam.
You hide them in the shelter of your presence,
safe from scheming enemies.
You conceal them in your tent,
away from the strife of tongues.
Blessed be the Lord,
marvelously he showed to me
his mercy in a fortified city.
Though I had said in my alarm,
‘I am cut off from your eyes.’
Yet you heard my voice, my cry for mercy,
when I pleaded with you for help.
Love the Lord, all you who are faithful to him.
The Lord protects the loyal,

but repays the arrogant in full.
Be strong and take heart,
all who hope in the Lord.”

(Psalm 31).

On our part, God the Father’s goodness calls for confidence. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus said: “We can never have too much confidence in the Good God; He is so mighty, so merciful. As we hope in Him so shall we receive” (*Story of a Soul*, 12, 40).

This confidence in the Father is in spite of our miseries and physical limitations. It is a confidence in God the Father in spite of our spiritual defects and shortcomings, even if they have been as great as mortal sin. As Saint Teresa of Jesus says in one of her *Letters*, every person, even if they are a great sinner, “has . . . a good God who loves them.”

A God so good can only be loved. There is no greater reward than to love God, and no more atrocious punishment than to be unable to love Him.

24.

A Father and two extraordinary gifts

“My Father gives you the true bread from heaven”

(Jn 6:32).

Even if everything good we receive is from the Father, Jesus emphasizes the Divine goodness when He mentions two particularly extraordinary gifts: the Eucharist and the Holy Spirit.

Regarding the first, in the *Bread of Life Discourse* He says: “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (Jn 6:32). The Bread from Heaven is His very body:

“Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and

my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him' (Jn 6:53-56).

These words scandalized the majority of His followers, in spite of the fact that never before had such touching words been uttered on the face of the earth, and nor would they ever hear anything like them in the future.

Jesus insists that this is His Father's work: "Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever" (Jn 6:57-58).

As Paul will say later on, that bread is "a participation with the Body of Christ and a participation with the Blood of Christ" (cf. 1 Cor 10:16).

Regarding the second gift, which is called "Gift" *par excellence*, Jesus Himself will say: "[Behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you" (Lk 24:49). Elsewhere He says: "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Lk 11:13).

Saint Paul explains that the Father sends us the Holy Spirit precisely so that He might teach us to be children and to deal with God as such: "God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal 4:6).

The Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father and of the Son, promised by the Father from the deepest designs of His Heart. “When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father. . . .” (Jn 15:26). In like manner: “The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name” (Jn 14:26).

It is the Holy Spirit who instructs and teaches us: “the holy Spirit . . . will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you” (Jn 14:26). “When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He . . . will declare to you the things that are coming” (Jn 16:13). He will bear witness to Jesus Christ, thus bringing us to faith: “the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father . . . will testify to me” (Jn 15:26).

The Spirit is the one who cares for us in Christ’s name, and He guides us with fatherly care in His Name: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn 14:16-18).

25.

A Father who is revealed in His Son

“If you knew me, you would know my Father also”

(Jn 8:19).

It’s worthwhile to insist on this very important idea: we see the Father in Jesus Christ.

Jesus spoke so much about the Father that, at the end of His life, the apostles ardently desired to see Him. “Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us,” says Philip (Jn 14:8). “That vision of the Father is the end of all our desires and actions,” writes Saint Thomas, commenting on this passage. He adds citations from two Psalms: “You will fill me with joy by your face,” (Ps 16:11) and “He satisfies your desire with good things” (Ps 103:5). However, this also provokes Jesus’ magnificent complaint-revelation: “Have I been with you for so long a time and

you still do not know me, Philip? 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?” (Jn 14:9-10).

Jesus had said something similar to His adversaries, although not so explicitly. When some asked Him, “Where is your father?” Jesus replied to them, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also” (Jn 8:19). A few verses later He adds: “I tell you what I have seen in the Father’s presence; then do what you have heard from the Father” (8:38).

There’s no doubt that this second affirmation, said in the context of a discussion with his opponents, can be understood as though He were saying that the Pharisees don’t know the Father because they reject the Son, since there are unbreakable links between the Father and the Son. However, I think that the dialogue with Philip during the Last Supper goes beyond this. Jesus is not the Father (there were heretics—like Sabelius—who would understand Christ’s words in this way); His formula, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me,” speaks more of a mutual penetration among the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity and of their unity of essence, and not of an identity of persons. We know that Jesus is “one” with the Father with regard to the divine nature: “The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30); “Believe the works, so that you may realize [and understand] that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38). However, at the same time, He also affirms that He is distinct from the Father, and for this rea-

son He constantly repeats: “the Father who sent me” (Jn 5:37), “I am going to the Father” (Jn 14:12), “I am going to my Father” (Jn 20:17), thus distinguishing Himself from the Father.

Nevertheless, He also says, as He did to Philip, that for us He is the face of the Father. I believe that this too must be understood as something more, namely: that His attitudes are paternal, and His virtues towards men are those proper to a father, thus reflecting that the love that He—Jesus—reveals to us, is the Father’s love, His embrace shows us the Father’s embrace, His mercy shows forth the Father’s mercy, His tenderness uncovers that of the Father, His providence makes known the concern that the Father has for every person, His protection proclaims the security that the Father offers us. The father that Jesus describes in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15) is, for this reason, an image both of God the Father as well as Jesus Himself who, as the perfect Son, reflects the traits learned from His Father.

In this way, by knowing Jesus, we men and women not only delve into the mystery of the Second Person of the Trinity (as is obvious), but also, in a hidden way, something of the mystery of the First Person is opened to us.

It’s for this reason that Saint Paul would later say that “[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God,” (Col 1:15). That image, “eikon,” is a perfect representation, and also the perfect manifestation of something. Therefore, the Apostle is saying that Jesus Christ is the “perfect manifestation of God.” In order to what God is like, we should look at Jesus. Since the word “eikon” was

also used in Greek legal documents in order to indicate the main characteristics of one of the contracting parties, in such a way that there wouldn't be any mistakes about the identity of the signers later (a sort of brief summary of the most outstanding characteristics of each of the contracting parties, just as today our pieces of ID have our photos), the Apostle is telling us that in Jesus Christ we see the traits that are proper to God, His notable characteristics; to see Him means to understand what God the Father is like. Jesus is the one who reveals the Father, not only by speaking of the mystery of the Father, but rather by making the Father known through His actions.

Irenaeus of Lyon left us this magnificent paragraph:

“And for this purpose did the Father reveal the Son, that through His instrumentality He might be manifested to all. . . . The Father therefore has revealed Himself to all, by making His Word visible to all; and, conversely, the Word has declared to all the Father and the Son, since He has become visible to all. . . . For by means of the creation itself, the Word reveals God the Creator; and by means of the world [does He declare] the Lord the Maker of the world; and by means of the formation [of man] the Artificer who formed him; and by the Son that Father who begot the Son. . . . And through the Word Himself who had been made visible and palpable, was the Father shown forth, although all did not equally believe in Him; but all saw the Father in the Son: for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father. And for this reason all spoke with Christ when He was present [upon earth], and they named Him God. Yes, even the demons exclaimed, on behold-

ing the Son: “We know You who You are, the Holy One of God.” And the devil looking at Him, and tempting Him, said: “If You are the Son of God”—all thus indeed seeing and speaking of the Son and the Father, but all not believing [in them].

(*Against Heresies*, Bk. IV, Ch. 6, 5-6).

26.

A Father who prunes us

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit”

(Jn 15:1-2).

Christ is the true “Vine”; His Father is the vine grower of the spiritual vine in which He is planted. Therefore, Christ is the one who directly influences the “branches,” and the Father is the one who infuses life into them.

We are the “branches,” His children and the faithful, in the measure that we are united to Him. Jesus speaks with real knowledge about the job of being a vine grower. The branch that doesn’t give fruit is pruned. The vine must be left clean; other growths must be encouraged. When the vine has too many growths, too many branches, those excessive growths which con-

sume the vine must be cleared off, since they inhibit the good branches from producing abundant fruits. All of this has a spiritual application to the Church and to souls.

Christ is speaking about Christians, since He speaks of “all those that are in Me,” meaning, united to Him. This can happen in two ways.

The first is to be in Him, but without “giving fruit.” Such a one the Father “will take away.” Someone is united to Christ without giving fruit when his or her union is by means of a weak faith, since “faith without works is a dead faith,” such as happens when faith “is not alive with charity.” Speaking of these branches, Jesus says that they will be cut from the vine, although He doesn’t specify when that will take place. It could take place at death, or by excommunication or separation from Christ, or by the loss of faith. However, the warning is very serious: this sort of “branch” is liable to be torn off from the vine. Even Judas was united to Jesus. Perhaps the reference to the branches that will be “gathered and thrown into a fire” (15:6) alludes particularly to the final judgment.

Who will cut them? The Father, who is the “vine dresser,” although we must understand this in the sense that He cuts them *once they have rendered themselves useless*: if the branches fall it is because they are torn off; it’s not the stem that throws them off. The Father, the “vine dresser,” will do what corresponds to that culpable separation, to that sterile way of being on the vine. This teaching shows us the responsibility that we have in the misuse of

our freedom and the culpability that is ours when we don't cooperate with grace.

On the other hand, if, by being united to Christ, the branch "gives fruit," the Father "vine dresser" will "prune it," meaning, He will "purify it." He is the one who exercises this providence upon the "Vine" and its "branches." He says "every one that gives fruit," opening the eyes of real Christians to the vast panorama of "beneficial purifications" that the saints speak of. Why does He prune it? "So that it might bear more fruit."

When the branches on a vine multiply excessively, the disproportionate proliferation drains the sap, and the branches lose strength and ripeness. Therefore, the Father "vine dresser" "purifies" them, removing all the obstacles that could delay or obstruct the full movement of the sap in the "branch," so that it might mature in Christ. This teaching gives the deepest commentary on the terrible question of the Book of Job: "Why do the just suffer?" The reply coincides with that of Saint Augustine: "Almighty God . . . because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself." It is a temporal pruning in order for there to be an eternal fruitfulness.

Jesus doesn't say what this purification will be like. However, it must consist of crucifying what is human in order to live the divine life. Jesus expressed it in a phrase directed to every disciple: "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me." Perhaps for some this might mean surrendering one's entire life; for many

others it is made concrete in daily self-denial and in crucifixion by means of daily difficulties.

The prunings of life, our sorrows, loneliness, evils, trials, acquire a new character in this expression of Jesus: the Father's immense love is manifested in them.

27.

A Father who prepares Paradise for us

“Rejoice because your names are written in heaven”

(Lk 10:20).

The love that the Father feels for each of us culminates in making us live forever: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life” (Jn 6:40); “the Father raises the dead and gives life” (Jn 5:21).

The Lord also expresses this, with a dense and beautiful thought, during His farewell at the Last Supper: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. . . . I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be” (Jn 14:2-3).

It is Jesus who prepares a place for us; however, that place is in His Father's house, which will become "our house" because that is the Father's good pleasure. As the Lord says in Saint Luke's Gospel: "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). In other words, He will give us His intimate, interior life for all eternity.

Saint Teresa wrote: "Do you suppose it matters little what Heaven is and where you must seek your most holy Father? I assure you that for minds which wander it is of great importance not only to have a right belief about this but to try to learn it by experience, for it is one of the best ways of concentrating the mind and effecting recollection in the soul" (Saint Teresa, *Way of Perfection*, ch. 28, 1).

As we said earlier, to see God and to possess Him is the deepest and most existential desire of every rational creature, and we can see this in so many sacred texts:

"This will happen when my skin has been stripped off,
and from my flesh I will see God:
I will see for myself,
my own eyes, not another's, will behold him:
my inmost being is consumed with longing"
(Job 19:26-27).

The Psalmist says the same:

"I am just—let me see your face;
when I awake, let me be filled with your presence"
(Ps 17:15).

As the apostles teach, heaven is exactly that, the vision of God. As John writes: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Paul, too, writes: “When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:11-12).

This isn’t a corporal, but rather an intellectual vision: an intuitive knowledge, that is, a knowledge that is immediate and eternally present for the one who perceives God just as He is in Himself, immediately without any intermediary such as analogies, metaphors, images, etc.

It’s not a dark knowledge, but rather luminous, by means of which God is distinguished from any other reality. It’s not confused, but rather precise, a knowledge that makes us perceive God in His essential being, and not merely according to some accidental or generic aspect. It’s not abstract, extracted from creatures, like the knowledge we have now on earth (cf. Rm 1:20), nor is it by means of faith, taken from Revelation, but rather a concrete knowledge of God’s very essence. However, it is clearly not a knowledge that completely exhausts the divine mystery, because no creature could ever intensively and extensively embrace, in an adequate way, the whole realm of what is knowable of the Most Holy Trinity.

Indissolubly united to that vision is an entirely complete love of will, which is the love of a consummated friendship in which God is in the blessed as the beloved reality for the person who loves, through a union of the soul with God that is not merely affective, but rather real.

And from that vision and divine love there flows a full and everlasting joy that can never darken, diminish, or be taken away.

Dante describes it this way:

*Luce intellettuale, piena d'amore
amor di vero bien, pien di letizia;
letizia che trascende ogni dolcezza
(Par 30, 40-42)*

“Intellectual light full of love / Love of the true good, full of joy; / Joy that transcends all other sweetness.” Heaven will give us—and indeed already gives to those who live in it—the delightful possession of the Truth, who is an intellectual Light full of joy; the Love of the true good, full of joy; and the Joy that transcends all earthly sweetness.

“Now everlasting life is a good exceeding the proportion of created nature,” writes Saint Thomas Aquinas, “since it exceeds its knowledge and desire, according to 1 Corinthians 2:9: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man.’ And hence it is that no created nature is a sufficient principle of an act meritorious of eternal life, unless there is added a

supernatural gift, which we call grace” (*Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 114, a. 2). However, God’s goodness offers it to man.

If Christians only knew what heaven is, they would ask for it with so great a desire that any delay would be a torment to them: “I die because I don’t die,” as Saint Teresa said. Saint Thomas composed a prayer that he frequently prayed, asking for heaven. Here is one translation of it:

O God of all consolation,
you who see in us nothing but your own gifts,
I entreat you to give me,
at the close of this life, knowledge of the First Truth and
enjoyment of your divine majesty.

Most generous Rewarder, give to my body also
the beauty of lightsomeness,
responsiveness of flesh to spirit,
a quick readiness and delicacy,
and the gift of unconquerable strength.

And add to these an overflow of riches,
a spate of delights, a confluence of all good things,
so that I may rejoice
in your consolation above me,
in a place of lowliness below me,
in glorification of body and soul within me,
in delight of friends and angels all around me.

Most merciful Father,
being with you may my mind attain the enlightenment of
wisdom,
my desire, the fulfilment of its longing, my courage the
praise of triumph.

For where you are is avoidance of all danger,
plentitude of dwelling places,
harmony of wills.

Where you are is the pleasantness of spring,
the radiance of summer,
the fecundity of autumn,
and the repast of winter.

Give, Lord God,
life without death,
joy without sorrow,
that place where reigns sovereign freedom,
free security,
secure tranquility,
delightful happiness,
happy eternity,
eternal blessedness,
the vision of truth and praise, O God.

Amen.

Recalling a dream about heaven, Don Bosco limited himself to saying to the youth: “With Saint Teresa, I tell you what she affirmed about Paradise: they are things that, if you speak about them, lose value, because they are so beautiful that it’s pointless to force yourself to describe them” (*Memorias Biográficas del Oratorio*, vol. 7, 680).

Murmuring these words, almost as a song, “I am going to Light, to Love, to Life!” Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity passed away.

That is the gift of the Father.

28.

Conclusion: Devotion to the Father who has loved us

“You loved them even as you loved me”
(Jn 17:23).

With these impressive words, Jesus’ revelation regarding His Father and His relation to us reaches its climax. The Father has loved us in the same way that He loved Jesus. With reason, then, when Jesus rose from the dead, He could tell Mary Magdalene: “Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (Jn 20:17).

The fruit of all of Jesus’ revelation is what Saint Paul teaches: we can call God: “Abba, Father” (Rm 8:15).

In the face of the burning bush, Moses was told: “Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet” (Ex 3:5). This threshold of divine holiness could only be crossed by Jesus, but He has also wanted to bring us into the Father’s presence. This is why Saint Peter Chrysologus writes: “Our awareness of our status as slaves would make us sink into the ground and our earthly condition would dissolve into dust, if the authority of our Father himself and the Spirit of his Son had not impelled us to this cry: ‘Abba, Father!’ (Rm 8:15). . . . When would a mortal dare call God ‘Father,’ if man’s innermost being were not animated by power from on high?” (Saint Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 71*).

From here it can clearly be seen why devotion to the Heavenly Father is essential for the spiritual life, and even just for the internal balance of every person. Could a person be properly “centered” when he or she is missing something as fundamental as this radical connection with their being?

However, what does a spirituality centered on devotion to Our Father in heaven really consist of? It comprises of three great paths of the soul:

1st First and foremost, ascetically speaking, it consists of three fundamental virtues. The first is interior *silence*, because a person can’t find the Father in tumult and noise: “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret” (Mt 6:6). Then, there is the *humility* that springs from the awareness that we have received everything from Him: “What do you possess that you have not received?” *from the Father* (1 Cor

4:7). Finally, it consists of *simplicity* or unity of heart that is seen in the one who seeks Him without duplicity: “Be as simple as doves” (Mt 10:16).

2nd With regard to the notable characteristics of this devotion, we can point out three.

The first is the *dedication to the state of grace*, because that state is, above all, the presence of the Most Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in the depths of the soul: “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn 14:23). It is pointless to try to love the Father and to not value His presence in the soul as something more valuable than life itself. For this reason, to love the Father is incompatible with the state of mortal sin, in which the doors of the human heart are closed to the Father.

The second characteristic is *to live out the theological virtues intensively*, the virtues by means of which we are united to God: faith, hope, and charity. “For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus,” says Saint Paul (Gal 3:26).

The third characteristic is *docility to the Father’s will*. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21). God’s will is fulfilled in the living out of the commandments, in fidelity to the duties of one’s state in life, and in the filial surrender to the Father’s good will (“Father . . . your will be done!”).

3rd Lastly, with regard to the effects that this spirituality produces, we can point out three of the most sought after.

The first is *freedom*, since Saint Paul says that every creature wants to “share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rm 8:21). Those who fully live out their divine filiation are free: they are emancipated from their own egoism because, first of all, they think only of the Father’s glory, and they are free from created realities themselves because they no longer seek their supreme happiness in those objects, since they know only God can give them that.

The second effect is *peace*, the fruit of the Father’s love: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ep 1:2). This means peace with our past, because we know that we have been forgiven by His paternal Mercy; it is peace with respect to what is to come, since we know what He is preparing for us in His Kingdom. It is also peace in the present, because we entrust ourselves to His provident care.

Lastly, it consists in *happiness*: “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4). This joy is born from the awareness of being loved by the Father and having Him dwell in us. This truth is the highest source of happiness, as Jesus said at the Last Supper: “I have told you this [*the truth about the Father’s love and His presence in our souls*] so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11).

At the end of these pages, we recognize that we have said very little about this mystery that makes Jesus' heart leap for joy since, as Saint Gregory the Great says, "it's in our way, babbling, that we announce the divine heights." However, we are comforted that the great Saint Augustine wrote the following words in his *Confessions*:

"And what have I now said, my God, my life, my holy joy? What does any mortal say when speaking of You? Yet woe to the one who does not speak, for silence is the most eloquent voice."

29.

Homage to the Father

(Adapted from Émile Guerry)

Father, who showed your love for us by sending your Son to the world so that we might have life through Him (1 Jn 4:9);

Father, who destined us for adoption to yourself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of your will (Ep 1:5);

Father, who loved us to the point of wanting to make us truly your children (1 Jn 3:1);

Father, who sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts, which makes us cry out to You: Father! (Gal 4:6);

Father, who bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing under the heavens (Ep 1:3);

Father, who chose us before the creation of the world in order to be holy and blameless in your sight because of your love (Ep 1:4);

Father, who rescued us from the power of darkness to transfer us to the kingdom of your beloved Son (Col 1:13);

Father, who made us sharers in the inheritance of the holy ones in light (Col 1:12);

Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope (2 Thess 2:16);

Father of Jesus, who in your great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pt 1:3);

Father of mercies and God of all consolation (2 Cor 1:3);

Father, who makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45);

Father, who judges no one, but rather have given the power of judgment to your Son (Jn 5:22);

Father, who have life in yourself and who gave the Son possession of life in Himself (Jn 5:26);

Father, who sent your Son, Jesus, so that all who see and believe in Him might have eternal life (Jn 6:40);

Father of Jesus, who gives us the true bread from heaven (Jn 6:32);

Father, who sees in the secret of our souls (Mt 6:18);

Father, who knows all of our needs (Mt 6:32);

Father, who gives food to the birds of heaven and clothes the lilies of the field (Mt 6:26);

Father, without whose knowledge not a single sparrow falls to the ground (Mt 10:29);

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, who have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, but have revealed them to the childlike (Mt 11:25);

HOMAGE TO THE FATHER

Father, who seeks worshipers in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23);

Father of Jesus, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth comes (Ep 3:15);

Father of all, who is above all (Ep 4:6)

Father of lights, from whom all good giving and every perfect gift comes down (Jas 1:17);

Father, in whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change (Jas 1:17);

...I offer you,
in witness of my filial endearment,
the homage of my works, my thoughts,
my pains, my happiness, my victories, my failings,
and, in short, my entire life,
by means of the Heart of your Son
who has made your infinite Love known to me.

