

**Homily for the
Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, 1999
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This is the first month of the last year of preparation for the great jubilee of the year 2000. John Paul II has designated it as the Year of the Father.

St. Paul says that all paternity, all fatherhood, takes its name from God the Father. (Eph 3:14 NJB). That means that fathers are a reflection of God the Father, and the more so, the more fatherly they are. Human fathers are a reflection of God the Father. God the Father is made known through human fathers.

There is a deep psychological as well as theological truth, paradoxical as it is. The psychological truth is this: as is our experience with our human fathers, so is our image of God the Father.

If our father was angry and abusive, we are apt to so regard God the Father. If our father was weak, or distant, or away from the family, we are apt to imagine God the Father as distant, uncaring, absent from our lives and concerns.

If our father was caring, helpful, available in all our needs, facilitating our growth and development, we are apt to so also consider the heavenly Father and to love Him and make Him a part of our life, which is what He so ardently desires. St. Thérèse had such a father, and she was devoted to the heavenly Father.

Now take our society as a whole. Almost fifty percent of children come from families without a father. They have never experienced a live-in, loving and devoted father. They have a father biologically, but not a father exercising his fatherhood in their lives, supporting and loving them, and together with their mother, parenting them.

And what about the fifty percent who come from families in which the father is present? Many of these fathers are distant or weak or abusive. There is in our society a crisis of fatherhood.

Now the paradox is this. While all paternity is named from above, and we image God the Father from our image of our earthly father, yet Jesus has said, "No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son reveals Him." (Mt 11:27)

So while psychologically our image of God the Father is drawn from our human experience, through faith and love of Jesus, His Son, we come to know the Father as He really is through the revelation of the Son. This revelation can remedy the psychological deficiency stemming from a lack of a devoted human father.

Hence this revelation of the Father, who He is and what He is like, is more and more needed in our society today. One might say it is the most crucial element required for the health of our society and its members, so that they can become responsible, loving, caring, just, considerate, truthful, gentle, meek and pure. In other words, if human beings in our time are to be blessed, truly human and happy, they need to appropriate the revelation of the Father. Then they will become poor in spirit, meek, humble, pure, peace-makers, and rejoice in persecution for the love of the Lord. Thus, according to today's Gospel, we are blessed and happy.

So lacking the experience of a good father, faith can make us whole. But this faith comes from the knowledge and love of Jesus. It is by falling in love with Jesus, that we have come to know the Father.

And what is the Father truly like? We know Jesus who has come into the world to counsel us, converse with us, lay down His life on our behalf. "Greater love than this no man has than that He lay down his life for his friends." (Jn 15:13) Such is the love of Jesus. And such is the love of the Father, who "so loved the world that He gave his only Son to save it." (Jn 3:16) The Son is the Image of the Father: "He who sees the Father," Jesus says, "sees Me." (Jn 14:9) Such as Jesus is, so is the Father. Moreover the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. (Cf. Jn 14:11) It is the Father in the Son who cures people, redeems and loves us.

The Father and the Son love each other, and from this love proceeds the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus shows forth the Father as His Wisdom, the Father does nothing in a high-handed or arbitrary or oppressive way, so the Holy Spirit shows forth the nature of the Father and of the Son, that they are love—love that seeks not its own, but the welfare of the other.

In the Trinity, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in majesty and nature to the Father, but they know that their origin is from the Father and so they reverence His headship. So the Son shows forth His consuming love for the Father, and the Father's consuming love for us. Thoroughly convinced of the Father's love for us, we make the Father a part of our life, directing, counseling, strengthening and assisting us in all our steps.

It is through frequent reflection on the Father and His love for us that we come to make Him part of our life. Side by side with this reflection is our prayer life. Dom Chapman, the great English Benedictine prayer master, tells us: Pray as you can, and not as you can't. Follow your attraction. If your attraction is to think of and pursue Jesus, follow that attraction. If you are driven to Mary, follow that attraction; she will lead you to her Son. If your attraction is to remain lovingly quiet before the God who is all, before whom all being is as nothing, do that.

But from time to time we reflect on the great truths revealed in Jesus, particularly the truths about His Father and His Spirit of truth and love. Thus the awareness of the Father's love heals our wounds, Mary's love heals our wounds, Jesus heals our wounds, and the Spirit inspires and strengthens us.

Thus we show forth in our lives the blessedness that comes from being poor, meek, humble, pure, and peacemakers, and we give homage and glory to God the Father. Blessed be His Name forever!