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# Divine Paternity

by

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*This paper was presented to the students and faculty of Mt. Angel Seminary*

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Our Father, who is in heaven, revealed Himself as the source of all true fatherhood to St. Paul, who exclaimed: *I bow my knees to the Eternal Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named* (Eph 3:14-15, DRV). Whoever is honored and dignified with the name father has derived the name from the Eternal Father who is the Father of all angelic spirits in heaven and of all men and women on earth. Our Father who is in heaven desires to infuse all those who bear the name "Father" with His own infinite goodness, truth and wisdom in order that all fathers here on earth be like Him.

The natural order is an image of the supranatural order. In the natural order, parents are the architects of their child's brain and personality. The tiny boy child adores his father and becomes the image of his father through living with his father. He becomes like his father not just by imitation of his father; he becomes like his father not just by watching his father's gestures, emotions and reactions; he becomes like his father primarily through the daily reciprocal interactions with his father: the communion of persons, father with son. The good father communes with his son by listening attentively and not intrusively; by protecting the son, but not overprotecting; the father inspires the son, but not to goals beyond the child's capacities; the father enforces rules and standards firmly, but with kindness; the father corrects, but does not humiliate; the father encourages without criticizing; the father enjoys his son and radiates pride without wearing his son's achievements as a badge of honor. This good father redeemed his fatherhood through Christ Jesus and through his relationship with the Eternal Father, has become a father in likeness to the Eternal Father.

We become like the person whom we idealize and know in a close mutually reciprocal relationship. Is it possible to know the Person of the Eternal Father? To answer this question let us first ask: How do we know any person? How do I know you? I can know your name, that you are a

student, that you are also a musician, that you are friendly and have a reputation for hard work but do I really know you? The words provide knowledge about you but I will only know you if you choose to honestly reveal yourself to me. It is only in the experience of a revelatory relationship of reciprocal interactions occurring over time that we know each other as persons. Revelation of the person comes through participation in each other's revealed interior life.

How do we know the Person of the Eternal Father? We know about Him through Tradition and Sacred Scripture. We will know and adore Him as a Person only when He reveals Himself to us and invites us to participate in His interior life and we respond by inviting Him to participate in ours. The Eternal Father desires to reveal Himself to us in order that we may know Him and not only know Him, but to boast that we know Him: *Rich man, do not boast of your riches; wise man, do not boast of your wisdom; strong man, do not boast of your strength; but you who know me, BOAST that you know Me and understand Me, that I am loving and kind, just and good* (Jr 9:23-24).

In the great theophanies of the Old Testament the Lord revealed Himself to the prophets and patriarchs. Job, after losing everything – wife, children, property, health, and friends – prayed with perseverance to the Lord. The Eternal Father listened to Job's questions and complaints and responded to him with an intimate revelatory encounter. As Job experienced the unfathomable holiness of the Father's interior life, his heart was overcome with awe for the Lord's greatness and his own unworthiness. A transformation occurred within him and he cried out: *I have heard of you, Lord, through word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you. Therefore I disown what I have said and repent in dust and ashes* (Job 42:5-6).

To Abraham and his wife Sarah, the Lord revealed Himself as three men who prophetically announced the birth of a son<sup>9</sup> Isaac and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham accepted with grace the announcement of the gift of a son but of the destruction of the cities, he reasoned and bargained with the Lord (Gn 18: 1-18). The prophet Daniel, who lived 550 years before the birth of Jesus, was anguished and terrified when he saw the Eternal Father in a Trinitarian vision: *I beheld til thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days sat. His garment was as white as snow and the hair on his head like clean wool; His throne like flames of fire; the wheels of it like burning fire. A swift stream of fire issued forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to him and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him. Then one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him* (Dn 7: 9-13, DRV).

The fullness of revelation of the Lord as a relationship of three persons came only through the Incarnation of Jesus as he revealed Himself first to His apostles and disciples, then to the fathers of the Church. Through their

teachings and sacred scripture, we learn of the one Lord in three persons. We experience and know Him in our heart and adore Him as three persons when the Lord reveals Himself to us in the reciprocal intimate communion of persons. St. John of Damascus wrote: "I worship one God, one Godhead, but I adore three persons: God the Father, God the Son made flesh, and God the Holy Spirit" (St. John of Damascus, *On Divine Images*, translation by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1980, p. 14).

The Eternal Father is Father from the beginning and He is without beginning. The Father is always a father in His very being, since from the beginning He generates the Word. *The Lord said to me, you are my son; this day I have begotten you* (Ps 2:7). This day is eternity. Before all time the Son is generated, consubstantial with the Father, and united with Him in the Holy Spirit. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). No one can perfectly comprehend the infinite glory and majesty of the Father's being because *the Father dwells in inapproachable light whom no man has seen or can see* (1 Tim 6:16). *No one knows the Father except the Son and He to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him* (Mt 11:27). Jesus chose to reveal His Father to St. Steven on the occasion of Steven's martyrdom. St. Steven was filled with the Holy Spirit and, looking up intently to heaven, saw the *glory of God the Father and Jesus standing at His right hand* (Acts 7:55).

*Jesus is the image of the invisible Father* (Col 1:15). "Jesus said, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me'" (Jn 14:11); *If you have seen me, you have seen my Father* (Jn 14:9). The Son is the Mediator Dei – the mediator between man and the Eternal Father. The Son is the High Priest whose sacrifice opens the door for man to enter into a relationship with the Eternal Father; to know Him, to adore Him and to boldly approach His throne of grace to *receive the immeasurable riches of His kindness* (Eph 2:7).

The Apostles witnessed Jesus' relationship with His Father and every day they saw an intimate communion of respect, attentiveness, trust, dependence and affection between Father and Son. They observed the Son give glory to the Father: *The words that I speak I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing His works* (Jn 14:12). The Apostles heard the Father enjoying and affirming His Son at the baptism of Jesus and at the transfiguration on Mt. Tabor: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased. Listen to him* (Mt 17:5, Mk 1:11).

Only on the night of the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane was the true depth of the Father-Son relationship revealed in its fullness of tenderness and intimacy. The apostles heard Jesus cry out in Aramaic to his Father, *Abba*, and in that one word the depth of the filial intimacy was revealed. *Abba* is an expression of tenderness and affection; *Abba* conveys humility and submissiveness; it conveys a trust in the father to be strong, all-powerful and close by; it conveys a trust that the father will do always what is absolutely

right and good for the son. Abba is best translated from Aramaic into English as "Daddy." The Son, our Lord, call his own father "Daddy." Has any man ever called his God Daddy! In biblical history did any man call his own father Daddy? This is unprecedented in biblical history or even in the history of any religion. Jesus is a man of thirty-three years. His father is God!

How many of us have experienced the level of trust and tenderness to call our own earthly father Daddy? For many the word daddy is so utterly foreign to their experience of father that, when saying the word, their tongue sticks to the roof of their mouth and the word comes out garbled.

It is amazing to hear Jesus call His Father Daddy because we are not accustomed to hear strong men do so; we think it isn't manly. Wouldn't we laugh if we heard Donald Rumsfeld call his father Daddy? Or think of Rush Limbaugh. Yet here is the most masculine of all men ever to walk the earth – Jesus – the bravest, boldest, the most courageous, the most unflappable, the most straightforward, the most outspoken and fearless of men. Men either recognized Him or were jealous of Him. He forcefully and angrily kicked out of the sacred temple those whom he called hypocrites. To the Pharisees who pretended to honor God but continued in iniquity, he railed in their faces: *...blind fools, you are filled with evil and death... serpents, brood of vipers* (Mt 23:17, 25, 27,33). To the men without guilt and to the humble of heart He said, "Follow me" and they laid aside everything in life and followed Him. Jesus, the mightiest of all warriors, conquered his enemies, the demons, with His words. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and calmed the raging seas. He was kind and gentle with the poor and the weak and He was the ultimate defender of woman. This is the essence of masculinity! This is a great man, the strongest of all men! Jesus calls His father Daddy and we are amazed!

The single most significant reason for our amazement is the circumstances of the revelation of filial intimacy. It is after the Last Supper and Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane praying to His Father. His Father has asked of Him nothing short of obedience to the worst torture, humiliation, and death ever experienced by a man. The weight of this is so heavy, it causes Jesus to sweat drops of blood and to confide to His closest friends, *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful. Please remain here with me and watch. He then walked a short distance and fell flat on the ground and prayed to His father: If it is possible, please let the hour pass from me. Daddy, all things are possible to you; take this chalice from me; but not what I will, but what you will* (Mk 14:34-36, DRV). The intense labor and pain and sorrow and dread cause our Lord Jesus to cry out in desperation to His all-powerful daddy to rescind and rescue him from what is to come, if His Father wills. Jesus calls His Father Daddy in this, the worst of circumstances, and therefore we are led to assume that He calls His Father Daddy on every day in every circumstance. The Holy Spirit chooses this

circumstance to unveil the tenderness of the love between Father and Son and the point is driven home to us.

Jesus knows His father is very close to Him and is suffering with Him. He knows His Father is suffering the agony of a father who knows what lays before his beloved, only son. This is the ultimate sacrifice, to ask His only Son *to give his life as an offering for sin... to bear the iniquities of many... and through his suffering to win pardon for their offenses* (Is 53: 10-12). This is the sacrifice the Infinite Knowledge knew was necessary to wrench all men from the death grip of sin and Satan. The Eternal Father gave His only Son and He mourned for him *as one who mourns for His only son and He grieved over him as over the death of a first born son* (Zec 12:10). Who can comprehend this love that the Father would ask His only Son and His Son would so agree to extreme torment, torture and death and for what? To rescue those who reject the Father, to rescue those spit upon the Son, to rescue those who revile and hate the Father and despise the Son! This is crazy love! This is a love that is madness.

*For the sake of the joy that lay before him Jesus endured the cross, and its shame* (Heb 12:2). After His crucifixion, death, and resurrection, in the garden Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, *I go to my Father and to your Father* (Jn 20:17). This is the love that is madness! This is the love that you and I know because it is the love of *the Father who has rescued you and me from the power of the evil spirit and brought us into the Kingdom of Our Father's beloved Son* (Col 1:13). This is the love by which we are born again of the Eternal Father and adopted as His own children. *What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God* (1 Jn 3:1, DRV); *being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed* (1 Pt 1:23).

The astounding consequence of Our Lord's crucifixion, death, and resurrection is that we can be adopted by the Eternal Father and can become members of Jesus' own family! We are invited to call the Father of Jesus, Our Father. And not only to call Him Father, but also to enter into an intimate, tender, trusting relationship with Him; to know Him as Abba, Daddy, the most affectionate of names. *We have received the Spirit of adoption; whereby we cry, Abba* (Rom 8:15). *All, especially those who have been neglected, mistreated, and rejected by their own father can be taken up into the arms of the Eternal Father who will love them as His very own children* (PS 27:10) *He will wipe away their tears and they will remember their sorrow no more* (Is 25:8, Rev 21:4). This is so unspeakably marvelous that it seems unbelievable. Perhaps because it seems unbelievable, we do not know what it means and we neglect this treasured inheritance and never enter into a relationship with the Eternal Father.

This difficulty is expressed in the following dialogue between Jesus and Adopted Son:

Jesus approaches Adopted Son and says: Come, let us go to my Father. I want you to know him as your Father.

Adopted Son hesitates and then replies: Lord Jesus, if it is all the same to you, you go on without me. I have heard of your Father who sits upon a throne of flaming fire and surrounded with thunder and lightning (Rev 4:2,5). I have heard of His greatness and I fear Him.

Jesus: As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on you who fear Him (Ps 103:13).

Adopted Son: You, most precious Lord Jesus, are my high priest. Why do I need to go to your Father?

Jesus: O you of little understanding, do you not know that I am your High Priest precisely to expiate your sins in order to reconcile you with My Eternal Father!

Adopted Son: With all due respect to you, most gracious Lord Jesus, I am not much interested in a father. What I know of a father is that mine was not around much and when he was, he either ignored me or he criticized me or he yelled. I learned to get along fine without a father and I am not interested in trying out another father.

Jesus: My father is very interested in you and *He listens attentively to your conversations* (Mal 3:16). He will never criticize you or hurt you. Neither will He ever betray you or abandon you. *He has sent His Spirit into your heart who wants you to cry out to Him, Abba, Father* (Gal 4:6).

Adopted Son: My Lord and priest forever according to the Order of Melchizedek, I am honored by your invitation to accompany you to your Father but I really feel and the truth is, Lord Jesus, you understand me. You know my past, my sins and you have forgiven me. Your Father is too perfect and too good to have me around.

Jesus: Son of Adoption, listen to the words my Father longs for you to hear: *When you were a child, how I loved you and called you to be my son. It was I who taught you to walk and bending down I fed you. With tender cords of love I did lead you and when you fell I gathered you in my arms and raised you to my face. But you did not*

*know that it was I who loved you and healed you. The more I called to you, the farther you went from me...But how could I give you up? My heart is overwhelmed (Hos 11:1-4, 8).*

Adopted Son: He knows my past and how I rebelled and sinned against him! I cannot go. I am too ashamed.

Jesus: *You who are tempest-tossed and grieved, fear not. You shall not be put to shame; you need not blush, for you will not be disgraced...The shame of your youth, you shall forget... With great tenderness the Father will take you to himself (Is 54:4, 7, 11).*

Adopted Son: Maybe, maybe I can forget my sins, but how can I face your Father who never forgets anything?

Jesus: My Father will say to you: *Why do you remind me of your sins? I have forgotten them for my own sake so that I can have a relationship with you. I do not remember your sins (Is 43:25). Your sins have been washed away with the blood of my Son Jesus and I desire to clothe you in fine linens, white and clean (Rev 7:14, 19:8).*

Adopted Son recounts: I arose in obedience and with fear and trembling set off to approach the throne of the Eternal Father. *When I was still a great way off, the Eternal Father saw me and was filled with compassion and joy and He ran to me, gathered me in his embrace, kissed me and said: Let us celebrate with a feast and make merry with music and dancing because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found (Lk 15:20, 22-24). My Father rejoiced over me with gladness and renewed me in his love. He sang joyfully because of me (Zep 3:17). I heard the voice of many harpers, harping of their harps and singing a new canticle (Rev 14: 2-3), the canticle of the Lamb: Great and wonderful are thy works O Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways O King of Ages. Who shall not fear thee and magnify thy name, for you alone are holy and all nations shall come and adore you because your righteous acts are manifest (Rev 15:3-4, DRV). My Father dried my tears and smiled at me. Then my Eternal Father laughed and all the heavens laughed with Him. His laughter filled my heart with happiness and I laughed. The King of the Whole Universe is happy. I have come home and you are my Father, and the Spirit in my heart cries out to you, Abba, Daddy.*

Our Father calls us to Himself, to participate in His divine nature, in His joy and happiness, in His greatness and goodness. He lifts us into His glorious presence and places us within His tabernacle *upon His throne* (Rev 3:21) and says *Come to the great feast of the King* (Rev 19:17). He wills that we partake of His sanctity, His Purity, and His holiness. Because sin and evil cannot exist in His presence, His Holy Fire penetrates our flesh (Rev 4:4; Mal 3: 2-3), cleanses it and we lose our capacity to sin. In His presence we cannot sin; *no one who remains in Him sins!* (1 Jn 3:6) In His presence there is perfection of goodness and truth, peace, and joy and we are changed so that we can stand without fault before the throne of God. St. John of Damascus said, "By union with His Divine Person, our flesh participates in the divine nature and by this communion becomes like God by the operation of Divine grace" (St. John of Damascus, p. 27).

Adopted Son recalls for us his experience of continually sitting in the Presence of His Eternal Father and participating in the divine reciprocal, revelatory relationship of love.

Adopted Son: I feel His kindness and His goodness and His perfect knowledge of me. I trust Him. He tells me the truth and gives me perfect counsel. When I fall, He is stern and tells me to get up quickly and to correct my errors. He infuses me with His hope that I can, in Him, overcome all evil. He infuses me with His Chastity so I can love as He loves. He calls me to the highest and best that He has for me and gives me the ambition to attain it; to be holy as He is Holy. He shares His eyes with me so that I see others as He sees them. I see their potential and I do not stumble over their flaws or envy their strengths. He causes my heart to burn with the knowledge that they too can attain the highest and best that He has for them and I am zealous to pray for this.

This is Divine Paternity, the Fatherhood of God, the powerful source of love that transforms His sons and daughters into His likeness. The transformation of our person is not the destruction of our nature. It is not the loss of selfhood. It is not just a change of behavior, attitude, or habits. The transformation accomplished by Our Father is a marvel of Divine Omnipotence. He lifts us up out of the limits of our nature and so penetrates us with divine light that we lose the lowliness and imperfection of our fallen nature and we receive the precious garment of supranatural dignity. *Take away the filthy garments from him and say to him: I have caused your iniquity to pass from you and I will clothe you in festal garments. Put a clean miter on his head. See I have taken away from your iniquity* (Zec 3: 4-5). *Bring the best robe and put it on him and a ring for his hand and shoes for his feet* (Lk 15:22).

Biological birth is not enough to fulfill the purpose that God has ordained for us. Spiritual birth as the Father's adopted children is requisite. Adopted Son, in his narrative, described well his rebirth and transformation. Through union with Our Father, Adopted Son transcends his biological characteristics of jealousy, possessiveness, exclusivity and his demands for individual rights and selfish self-gratification. He is no longer insecure and competitive for attention and he has ceased to live in his fantasies and sensual thoughts. He no longer believes what the psychologists told him: You are just human and you must embrace and celebrate and express your human urges! When Adopted Son did what the psychologists told him he learned that sin is a pleasure that inflicts a wound. And the pain of the wound demands more sinful pleasure to cure the wound. But the wound is not cured by more sinful pleasure, instead sinful pleasure inflicts more and worse painful wounds that demand more and more sinful pleasures until Adopted Son was lost in the fallen dark vortex that pulled him closer and closer to death. The Cross of Jesus stopped his downward spiral and through the hard labor of penance and prayer and spiritual rebirth, he learned that the Lord alone gives pleasure that is not mixed with pain. Adopted Son now exalts the Lord and exclaims: "I adore my Eternal Father and I am my Father's Son. I am like Him. My flesh has been deified! It is the relationship with the Lord that transforms!"

Transformation into the likeness of Eternal Father has been decreed by the Supreme Majesty and Authority of God the Father. It is brought into reality through our cooperation with His superabundant grace. Our cooperation is to obediently follow Jesus into a relationship with the Eternal Father; into the communion of Trinitarian love and to live in it every day. Through Eucharistic and personal communion, we talk with Him, listen to Him, gaze in wonderment upon His glory and are one with Him. Communion is union.

Just as the little boy becomes like his father by living with and communing with his father, so too do all men who live with and commune with the Eternal Father become like Him, Who is the source of all true paternity. The relationship with the Eternal Father is the source of all true fatherhood. All fathers and all who will one day receive the title "father", are called to an intimate reciprocal relationship of communion with the Eternal Father and through the relationship to become fathers in the likeness of the Eternal Father. Then great will be their fecundity as they bring all their spiritual sons and daughters to the light of the Holy Trinity and to the Lord's Holy Feast. There they shall all be clothed upon with supranatural grace and comeliness and all shall know the Eternal Father as Abba.

*All Scripture references are from the St. Joseph edition of the New American Bible except for those notated by DRV, Douay Rheims Version.*