



I BELIEVE IN GOD: THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

The catechesis of the Holy Father Benedict XVI during the Year of Faith



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[VIDEO]

I believe in God: the almighty Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In last Wednesday's Catechesis we reflected on the opening words of the *Creed*: "I believe in one God". But the profession of faith specifies this affirmation: God is the almighty Father, Creator of heaven and earth. Thus I would like to reflect with you now on the first and fundamental definition of God which the *Creed* presents to us: he is Father.

It is not always easy today to talk about fatherhood, especially in the Western world. Families are broken, the workplace is ever more absorbing, families worry and often struggle to make ends meet and the distracting invasion of the media invades our daily life: these are some of the many factors that can stand in the way of a calm and constructive relationship between father and child. At times communication becomes difficult, trust is lacking and the relationship with the father figure can become problematic; moreover, in

this way even imagining God as a father becomes problematic without credible models of reference. It is not easy for those who have experienced an excessively authoritarian and inflexible father or one who was indifferent and lacking in affection, or even absent, to think serenely of God and to entrust themselves to him with confidence.

Yet the revelation in the Bible helps us to overcome these difficulties by speaking to us of a God who shows us what it really means to be “father”; and it is the Gospel, especially, which reveals to us this face of God as a Father who loves, even to the point of giving his own Son for humanity’s salvation. The reference to the father figure thus helps us to understand something of the love of God, which is nevertheless infinitely greater, more faithful, and more total than the love of any man.

“What man of you”, Jesus asks in order to show the disciples the Father’s face, “will give his son a stone if he asks for bread? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Mt 7:9-11; cf. Lk 11:11-13). God is our Father because he blessed us and chose us before the creation of the world (cf. Eph 1:3-6), he has really made us his children in Jesus (cf. 1 Jn 3:1). And as Father, God accompanies our lives with love, giving us his Word, his teaching, his grace and his Spirit.

As Jesus revealed — he is the Father who feeds the birds of the air that neither sow nor reap, and arrays the flowers of the field in marvellous colours, in robes more beautiful than those of Solomon himself (cf. Mt 6:26-32; Lk 12:24-28); and we, Jesus added, are worth far more than the flowers and the birds of the air! And if he is so good that he “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt 5:45), we shall always be able, without fear and with total confidence, to entrust ourselves to his forgiveness as Father whenever we err. God is a good Father who welcomes and embraces his lost but repentant son (cf. Lk 15:11ff.), who gives freely to those who ask him (cf. Mt 18:19; Mk 11:24; Jn 16:23), and offers the bread of heaven and the living water that wells up to eternal life (cf. Jn 6:32, 51, 58).

Thus, although the person praying in Psalm 27 [26] is surrounded by enemies and assailed by evildoers and slanderers, while seeking the Lord’s help he invokes him. The witness he bears is full of faith, as he states: “My father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up” (v. 10).

God is a Father who never abandons his children, a loving Father who supports, helps, welcomes, pardons and saves with a faithfulness that surpasses by far that of men and women, opening onto dimensions of eternity. “For his steadfast love endures for ever”, as Psalm 136 [135] repeats in every verse, as in a litany, retracing the history of salvation. The love of God the Father never fails, he does not tire of us; it is a love that gives to the end, even to the sacrifice of his Son. Faith gives us this certainty which becomes a firm rock in the construction of our life: we can face all the moments of difficulty and danger, the experience of the darkness of despair in times of crisis and suffering, sustained by our trust that God does not forsake us and is always close in order to save us and lead us to eternal life.

It is in the Lord Jesus that the benevolent face of the Father, who is in heaven, is fully revealed. It is in knowing him that we may also know the Father (cf. Jn 8:19; 14:7). It is in seeing him that we can see the Father, because he is in the Father and the Father is in him (cf. Jn 14:9,11). He is “the image of the invisible God” and as the hymn of the Letter to the Colossians describes him, he is: “the first-born of all creation... the first-born from the dead”, “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” and the reconciliation of all things, “whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:13-20).

Faith in God the Father asks for belief in the Son, under the action of the Spirit, recognizing in the Cross that saves the definitive revelation of divine love. God is our Father, giving us his Son; God is our Father, pardoning our sin and bringing us to joy in everlasting life; God is our Father, giving us the Spirit that makes us sons and enables us to call him, in truth "Abba, Father!" (cf. Rom 8:15). It is for this reason that Jesus, teaching us to pray, invites us to say "Our Father" (Mt 6:9-13; cf. Lk 11:2-4).

Consequently God's fatherhood is infinite love, tenderness that bends over us, frail children, in need of everything. Psalm 103 [102], the great hymn of divine mercy, proclaims: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (vv. 13-14). It is our smallness, our frail human nature that becomes an appeal to the Lord's mercy, that he may show his greatness and tenderness as a Father, helping, forgiving us and saving us.

And God responded to our plea by sending his Son who died and rose for us; he entered our frailty and did what man on his own could never have done: as an innocent lamb he took upon himself the sin of the world and reopened our path to communion with God, making us true children of God. It is there, in the Paschal Mystery, that the definitive face of the Father is revealed in its full splendour. And it is there, on the glorious Cross, that God's omnipotence as the "almighty Father" is fully manifested.

However, let us ask ourselves: how is it possible to think of an omnipotent God while looking at the Cross of Christ? At this power of evil which went so far as to kill the Son of God? Naturally, what we would like would be a divine mightiness that fitted our own mindset and wishes: an "omnipotent" God who solves problems, who intervenes to prevent us from encountering difficulties, who overcomes adverse powers, changes the course of events and eliminates suffering. Thus today various theologians say that God cannot be omnipotent, for otherwise there would not be so much suffering, so much evil in the world. In fact, in the face of evil and suffering, for many, for us, it becomes problematic, difficult, to believe in a God who is Father and to believe that he is omnipotent; some seek refuge in idols, succumbing to the temptation to seek an answer in a presumed "magic" omnipotence and its illusory promises.

Nevertheless faith in almighty God impels us to have a very different approach: to learn to know that God's thought is different from our own, that God's ways are different from ours (cf. Is 55:8) and that his omnipotence is also different. It is not expressed as an automatic or arbitrary force but is marked by a loving and paternal freedom. In fact by creating free creatures, by giving us freedom, God renounced some of his power, allowing for the power of our freedom. Thus he loves and respects the free response of love to his call. As Father, God wishes us to become his children and to live as such in his Son, in communion, in full familiarity with him. His omnipotence is not expressed in violence, it is not expressed in the destruction of every adverse power as we might like; rather it is expressed in love, in mercy, in forgiveness, in accepting our freedom and in the tireless call for conversion of heart, in an attitude only seemingly weak — God seems weak if we think of Jesus Christ who prays, who lets himself be killed. This apparently weak attitude consists of patience, meekness and love, it shows that this is the real way to be powerful! This is God's power! And this power will win! The sage of the Book of Wisdom addressed God in these words: "For you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook men's sins, that they may repent. For you love all things that exist.... You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who loves the living" (11:23-24a, 26).

Only those who are truly powerful can tolerate evil and show compassion; only those who are truly powerful can fully exercise the force of love. And God, to whom all things belong because all things were made by him, shows his power by loving everything and everyone, patiently waiting for the conversion of us human beings, whom he wants to be his children.

God waits for our conversion. God's omnipotent love knows no bounds, to the extent that he "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom 8:32). The omnipotence

of love is not that of worldly power, but is that of the total gift, and Jesus, the Son of God reveals to the world the true omnipotence of the Father by giving his life for us sinners.

This is the true, authentic and perfect divine power: to respond to evil not with evil but with good, to insults with forgiveness, to homicidal hatred with life-giving love. Thus evil is truly vanquished because it is cleansed by God's love; thus death is defeated once and for all because it is transformed into a gift of life. God the Father raises the Son: death, the great enemy (cf. 1 Cor 15:26), is engulfed and deprived of its sting (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-55), and we, delivered from sin, can have access to our reality as children of God.

Therefore, when we say "I believe in God the Father almighty", we express our faith in the power of the love of God who, in his Son who died and was raised, triumphs over hatred, evil and sin and unfolds before us the path to eternal life, as children who want to dwell for ever in their "Father's House". Saying "I believe in one God the Father almighty", in his power, in his way of being Father, is always an act of faith, of conversion, of the transformation of our thought, of the whole of our affection, of the whole of our way of life.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord to sustain our faith, to help us find true faith and to give us the strength to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ and to witness to him in love of God and of neighbour. And may God grant that we accept the gift of our sonship, in order to live in fullness the reality of the Creed, in trusting abandonment to the love of the Father and to his merciful omnipotence which is the true omnipotence and saves.

To special groups:

I offer a warm welcome to the priests taking part in the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Pontifical North American College. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including those from the Republic of Korea, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

The presence at this meeting of the Civil Authorities of Basilicata, to whom I address a respectful greeting, gives me the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all those who worked on the evocative Crib set up in this Square, which has been admired by countless pilgrims and also by me, with great joy, as an expression of the art of Lucania.

Lastly, I address the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Tomorrow is the liturgical Memorial of St John Bosco, a priest and educator. Look to him, dear *young people*, as to an authentic teacher of life. May you, dear *sick people*, learn from his spiritual experience to trust in every circumstance in the crucified Christ. And may you, dear *newlyweds*, have recourse to his intercession in order to live with generous commitment your mission as husband and wife. Many thanks.

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