



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 3 March 1999*

### ***Jesus' experience of God as Father and his intimate relationship with him***

1. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3). Paul's words are a good introduction to the newness of our knowledge of the Father as it unfolds in the New Testament. Here God appears in his Trinitarian reality. His fatherhood is no longer limited to showing his relationship with creatures, but expresses the fundamental relationship which characterizes his inner life; it is no longer a generic feature of God, but the property of the First Person in God. In his Trinitarian mystery, in fact, God is a father in his very being; he is always a father since from all eternity he generates the Word who is consubstantial with him and united to him in the Holy Spirit "who proceeds from the Father and the Son". In his redemptive Incarnation, the Word unites himself with us, precisely in order to bring us into this filial life which he possesses from all eternity. The Evangelist John says: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

2. Jesus' experience is the basis for this specific revelation of the Father. It is clear from his words and attitudes that he experiences his relationship with the Father in a wholly unique way. In the Gospels we can see how Jesus distinguished "his sonship from that of his disciples by never saying "Our Father", except to command them: "You, then, pray like this: "Our Father"" (Mt 6:9); and he emphasized this distinction saying, "my Father and your Father"" (CCC, n. 443).

Even as a boy he answered Mary and Joseph, who had been looking for him anxiously: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:48f.). To the Jews who had been persecuting him because he had worked a miraculous cure on the Sabbath he replied: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (Jn 5:17). On the cross he prayed to the Father to forgive his executioners and to receive his spirit (Lk 23:34, 46). The distinction between the way Jesus perceives God's fatherhood in relation to himself and in relation to all other human beings is rooted in his

consciousness and emphasized by him in the words he addresses to Mary Magdalen after the Resurrection: "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (Jn 20:17).

3. Jesus' relationship with the Father is unique. He knows he is always heard; he knows that through him the Father reveals his glory, even when men may doubt it and need to be convinced by him. We see all this in the episode of the raising of Lazarus: "So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you hear me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you sent me"" (Jn 11:41f.). Because of this unique understanding, Jesus can present himself as the One who reveals the Father with a knowledge that is the fruit of an intimate and mysterious reciprocity, as he emphasizes in his joyful hymn: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27) (cf. CCC, n. 240). For his part, the Father expresses the Son's unique relationship with him by calling him his "beloved" son: as he did at the baptism in the Jordan (cf. Mk 1:11), and at the moment of the Transfiguration (cf. Mk 9:7). Jesus is also depicted as the son in a special sense in the parable of the wicked tenants who first mistreat the two servants and then the "beloved son" of the vineyard owner, sent to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard (Mk 12:1-11, especially v. 6).

4. The Gospel of Mark has preserved for us the Aramaic word "Abba" (cf. Mk 14:36) with which Jesus, during his painful hour in Gethsemane, called on God, praying to him to let the cup of the Passion pass him by. In the same episode Matthew's Gospel has given us the translation "my Father" (cf. Mt 26:39, cf. also v. 42), while Luke simply has "Father" (cf. Lk 22:42). The Aramaic word, which we can translate into contemporary language as "dad" or "daddy", expresses the affectionate tenderness of a child. Jesus uses it in an original way to address God and, in the full maturity of his life which is about to end on the cross, to indicate the close relationship which even at that critical moment binds him to his Father. "Abba" indicates the extraordinary closeness that exists between Jesus and God the Father, an intimacy unprecedented in the biblical or non-biblical religious context. Through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the only Son of this Father, we too, as St Paul said, are raised to the dignity of sons and have received the Holy Spirit who prompts us to cry "Abba! Father!" (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). This simple, childish expression in daily use in Jesus' time and among all peoples thus acquired a highly significant doctrinal meaning to express the unique divine fatherhood in relation to Jesus and his disciples.

5. Although he felt united with the Father in so intimate a way, Jesus admitted that he did not know the hour of the final and decisive coming of the kingdom. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Mt 24:36). This is an indication of the "emptying of himself" proper to the Incarnation, which conceals the eschatological end of the world from his human nature. In this way Jesus disappoints human calculations in order to

invite us to be watchful and to trust in the Father's providential intervention. On the other hand, from the standpoint of the Gospels, the intimacy and absoluteness of his being "Son" is in no way prejudiced by this lack of knowledge. On the contrary, precisely because he is so united with us, he becomes crucial for us before the Father: "Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32f.)

Acknowledging Jesus before men is indispensable for being acknowledged by him before the Father. In other words, our filial relationship with the heavenly Father depends on our courageous fidelity to Jesus, his beloved Son.

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I extend a special greeting to the group of Knights of Columbus, as well as to the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre. I warmly welcome our Lutheran visitors from Stockholm and the students and faculty of the Theological University of Helsinki. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Finland and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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*The Holy Father expressed his satisfaction that Ethiopia and Eritrea had accepted the peace proposals of the Organization of African Unity following their recent clashes:*

Following the sad news of the brutal, deadly clashes in recent days between Ethiopia and Eritrea, we have now learned that both countries have accepted the peace proposals formulated by the Organization of African Unity. I applaud this wise decision, to which I join my fervent prayers. It is the only way to end this fratricidal struggle, to calm hearts and to promote a new style of government and harmony on the African continent.