

## Living the Spirit God is Father

We are rapidly drawing near the close of the Year of Faith. While I have not organized an agenda for the remaining themes of this Year, I would like in the time left to this observance to speak to a central idea. It is this: we believe in God. That leads me to want to write about God Himself. What do we know about Him? Do we know Him in a personal way? This month I am writing about God the Father.

One cannot read the Gospel without realizing that Jesus wanted us to understand that God is the Father. Of course, Jesus tells us that the Father and He are one. Theologians study God. That is what the word “theology” means – the study of God. As a seminarian preparing for priesthood I studied the first tract of theology called: Concerning the One God and the Trinity.

Without a doubt we must understand that there is but one God. We learn this in a practical way when we are taught the Ten Commandments. The very first Commandment says: “I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.” In fact, there are simply no other gods. History is replete with the errors of earlier times, where idols of wood and stone were seen as gods. Today we find it easy to speak of such things as money, power etc. as gods for some persons: Have you heard: “Money is his god?”

A great lay theologian, Frank Sheed, wrote a book called *Theology and Sanity*. For me it is still more than relevant in its core teaching. Perhaps the only thing missing would be examples that came after his time of writing (1946). He begins his discussion of God with a chapter: He Who Is. We accept that God actually exists.

At once he reminds us that no one can seriously think of God without being influenced by images they have beforehand. Perhaps some see God as a venerable (old) man with a beard, much as depicted on the Sistine Chapel’s ceiling by Michelangelo. Our images do tell us truths, however. Age in art can stand for what is ageless. God is eternal. Seeing God in the image of a man tells us more – God is a personal God, which truth is seen as revolting to modern secularists posing as theologians. There are many images that could be brought to mind as reflecting something about God.

Theology gives us in the words of Vatican I a good brief description of God. Let me translate this from the original: “The Church confesses (believes) that the one God is living and true, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, omnipotent (all-powerful), eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in every perfection of knowledge and will.... One single, spiritual substance, distinct from the world, most blessed and over all which outside Himself can be conceived....” (Third Session, canon 4)

We can know about God by using human reason. Sheed mentions this as giving humans the greatest compliment ever paid to human reason – the ability to know about God. But we know about God also from Revelation. He has told us about Himself in the Scriptures.

Those who study the Bible come to know a great deal about God. Of course, they need the help of the Church in order not to fall into error. As Catholics we believe what the Church teaches infallibly about God. We do not believe in private interpretation of the Scriptures. We also find in Tradition even more knowledge about God. This can be found in our study of the Creeds set forth in the Christian centuries by Councils and by the ordinary teaching of the Church. Needless to say, we also learn much about the uncreated God from His marvelous creation.

This brings us to other reflections that reason alone can bring. I think here of such as beauty and love. These are found in the Scriptural revelation. Our knowledge of God brings spiritual joy to the believer. It is also a joy of true knowing. It is more than mere feelings.

We should beware of those who always set their theological teachings in this frame: What do you feel about God? Our human feelings can be deceptive. They are certainly not able to provide suitable answers as we search for who God is.

Let me conclude by a different reflection worthy of meditation for this Year of Faith. Jesus revealed to us that God is our Father. That is what we are to call Him when we pray. Naming God as our Father leads us to think of the Son (a subject for the future). Simply by being Himself, God is the Father of His Son. He never had any existence except as Father. With His Son he is co-eternal. To know God as Father we do well to search the Scriptures.

I have always especially liked one passage of Scripture that tells us of God. It is where Jesus teaches us about God the Father in the parable called the Prodigal Son. We learn that the Father is filled with mercy. The Father loves his sons. He gives his younger son freedom, as he does not deny it to the elder. He waits patiently for the wayward to return home; He restores all to the penitent son. We read how generous this restoration is. The parable tells us of the abundance of God's gift of grace to sinners who repent.

I have often thought how we learn about God as Father from the living example of all the goodness found in human fathers. Today there is a tendency to characterize fathers as comic characters. There used to be a Mr. Milquetoast; there is a Dagwood Bumstead. However entertaining such images, I still insist that I have known so many great fathers among those I have tried to serve as a priest. I believe some – a goodly number – were saints. For those fathers still living, I can anticipate my judgment for what it is worth. We should be aware that we are surrounded by many ordinary saints, holy people. As an aside, I cannot help but note that good fathers need good mothers of their children to help them achieve the best of their vocation.

In a time when Catholics are called to evangelize the world with some urgency, each of us must start with ourselves. We must intensify our faith. We do this by making a real effort at knowing about God in a personal way. For us this will mean that we know God as our very own loving Father. Jesus used the word “*Abba*” which is a child's word for father. It is well translated as “loving Father.” Yes, God loves us. He loves us with power – He is all powerful. He loves us with infinite love – He has no limits on his love.

To begin to be true believers, we need the impulse of God's grace. He does not deny it to those who ask. The Church gives us this Year of Faith to remind us that we need to pray for an energizing faith. Even if our love of God has grown tepid or cold, we must not forget that the God who hears our prayers is a loving Father.

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Let us pray:

***Merciful Father, help me to love you with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul and all my strength, for you are my Father, now and forever. Amen.***

*God love you always!*  
*Monsignor David Morrison*

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