



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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1. At the dramatic moment when he was preparing to face death, Jesus ends his great farewell discourse (cf. Jn 13ff.) with a wonderful prayer to the Father. It can be considered a spiritual testament in which Jesus returns to the Father's hands the mandate he had received: to make his love known to the world, through the gift of eternal life (cf. Jn 17:2). The life he offers is significantly explained as a gift of knowledge. "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

Knowledge, in the biblical language of the Old and New Testaments, is not only intellectual, but usually implies a living experience which involves the whole human person including his capacity to love. This knowledge leads to an "encounter" with God, as part of that process which the Eastern theological tradition likes to call "divinization" and which takes place through the interior, transforming action of God's Spirit (cf. St Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catech.*, 37: PG 45, 98B). We already touched on these topics in the catechesis for the year of the Holy Spirit. Returning now to the words of Jesus just quoted, we want to reflect on what it means to have a living knowledge of God the Father.

2. God can be known as father at various levels, depending on the perspective from which we look at him and the aspect of the mystery considered. There is a natural knowledge of God which is based on creation: this leads us to recognize him as the origin and transcendent cause of the world and of man, and in this sense to perceive his fatherhood. This knowledge is deepened in the progressive light of Revelation, that is, on the basis of God's words and his interventions in salvation history (cf. CCC, n. 287).

In the Old Testament, knowing God as father means returning to the origins of the people of the

covenant: "Is he not your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" (Dt 32:6). The reference to God as father guarantees and maintains the unity of those who belong to the same family: "Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us?" (Mal 2:10). God is recognized as father even when he rebukes the son for his own good: "For the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prv 3:12). Obviously, a father can always be called upon in times of discouragement: "I called out: O Lord, you are my father, you are my champion and my saviour; do not abandon me in time of trouble, in the midst of storms and dangers" (Sir 51:10). In all these forms, the values experienced in human fatherhood are applied preeminently to God. We immediately realize that it is impossible to know the full meaning of this fatherhood except to the extent that God himself reveals it.

3. In the events of salvation history there is a gradual revelation of the Father's initiative: by his interior action he opens the hearts of believers to accepting the incarnate Son. By knowing Jesus, they will also be able to know him, the Father. This is what Jesus himself teaches in reply to Thomas: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father (Jn 14:7; cf. vv. 7-10).

Thus it is necessary to believe in Jesus and to see him, the light of the world, in order not to remain in the darkness of ignorance (cf. Jn 12:44-46) and to know that his teaching comes from God (cf. Jn 7:17f.). On this condition it is possible to know the Father and to become capable of worshiping him "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). This living knowledge is inseparable from love. It is communicated by Jesus, as he said in his priestly prayer: "O righteous Father? I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them" (Jn 17:25-26).

"When we pray to the Father, we are in communion with him and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Then we know and recognize him with an ever new sense of wonder" (CCC, n. 2781). Knowing the Father, then, means finding in him the source of our being and our unity as members of one family, but it also means being immersed in a "supernatural" life, the very life of God.

4. The message of the Son therefore remains the royal road for knowing the Father and making him known; in fact, as the expressive words of St Irenaeus recall, "knowledge of the Father is the Son" (Adv. Haer., IV 6, 7: PG 7, 990B). This possibility is offered to Israel but also to the Gentiles, as Paul emphasizes in the Letter to the Romans: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith" (Rom 3:29f.). God is one and he is the Father of all, who is eager to offer everyone the salvation brought by the Son: this is what John's Gospel calls the gift of eternal life. This gift must be accepted and communicated on the surge of that gratitude which led Paul to say in the Second Letter to the Thessalonians: "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thes 2:13).*****I extend a particular welcome to the Swedish Women's Educational Association. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Korea, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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