

There seems to be a great equalizing of the way in which people refer to God as 'father.' What we get from this is a homogenization of the fatherhood of God so much so that the appreciation for the great divine gift of baptism is lost and everyone 'becomes' children of God in the same sense. Is God the father of everything in the same sense? If one were to say yes, then the majesty of the 'Our Father' would mean nothing and the divinity of Jesus is a lie. What then is the difference between the Sonship of Jesus and the sonship of creatures? Some may even try to use St. Paul's verse in Ephesians 3:14-21: "I bend my knee to the Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named," to make their claim that there is no distinction. However, there are four ways by which God can be referred to as father. Bear with me, we are going into the heart of our beautiful faith.

To say 'Father' is not primarily to refer to God's relationship with His creatures, but to the eternal relation of the Father with His only Son communicating to him from within their unity the fullness of His divinity. It refers to the persons of the Trinity, not the Trinity's creative act as a whole with regard to creation. The Son is the perfect and Eternal word or image (icon) of the Father and He comes forth with the Father's fullness and His likeness. Much like a spoken word is the verbal image of a concept that is being communicated. Or, better still, imagine that someone asked you to reflect on yourself and generate in your mind, from that self-contemplation, one word that perfectly described you. Now, in an analogous way, just like that unspoken word of yourself has its origin from you, so the Son has His origin from the Father. This issuing forth in God's knowing is called begetting. Now, we cannot push the analogy too far because it will fail. We have a beginning, and God does not; God's knowledge creates from nothing, our knowledge of ourselves does not. God's Word expresses God the Father in all the Father's plenitude; God's Word expresses and also produces what exists in creatures. The Son is co-equal with the Father not subordinated to Him, the only distinction is that of a personal relation.

The concept of a creature being God's son is not present in creatures in its fullest sense, because God and creatures are radically different. St. Thomas Aquinas puts it well when he says: "A king's image can be found in his son who shares his nature, and on his coin, a thing of a different nature. The Son is God's image in the first way, man in the second." What is particular to mankind (and angels) is that we have the capacity to know and to will (to choose). These abilities image the Trinity: God's knowing and His willing. This second manner is common to all rational creatures (men and angels) both good and evil. Even though created in His image and likeness, this relation of sonship is solely of Creator to creature with no sharing in the Divine life, i.e., no grace, no participating in the Sonship of the Son. The dignity of all human life is based upon this likeness and image that we reflect as well as the capacity that we have for the following sense of calling God Father.

However, for the Saints in Heaven and the baptized here and now, there is a definitively deeper and other worldly participation in that divine Sonship of the Son that is not able to be said of any of the other of God's creatures. Just as the Son receives the fullness of divine being from all eternity, in a deriving manner, creatures by grace receive from God participation in the divine being and goodness, aligned to the similarity of the Son while still retaining their creaturely identity. For the Saints this assimilation is perfected in a dynamic consummation of love. For us here it is present but imperfect. Even though it is just beginning like a seedling, it is able to be deepened by the life of faith, sacraments, prayer, etc. So, when Jesus teaches the 'Our Father' He is opening up this mystery of our real and divine adoption as well as the mystery of the Trinity.

All non-rational creation (e.g., from the animals to the rain to outer space), can be said to be sons of God insofar as we say that God (Trinity) is the father of his creation. All creation receives its being and sustains its being from the creative action of God. But this common sonship that all creatures have pales in comparison to the Sonship that we can lay claim to in Christ, with Christ, and *only* through Christ.

Your servant in the Lord,

Seminarian Joe