

PASTORAL SECTION

HOMILETICS

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10TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (August 3)

GOD OUR FATHER

"Father, all life comes from You." — Eucharistic Prayer III

The new Eucharistic prayer formulas remind us over again of the Fatherhood of God. The new Sunday Prefaces, too, recall the wonderful thing that happened when God, in His pure goodness, made us His children and became our Father, a real Father, the very best possible Father. St. Paul tells us that all the best qualities of the best fathers that ever live on earth are only a reflection of the goodness and kindness of God, Who became our Father when we were baptized. If all the tender love of all good fathers for their children were added together, it would not add up to the tiniest fraction of the goodness and kindness of our wonderful Father in Heaven towards us, His children.

The attitude we should have towards God, the attitude that Christ, our Elder Brother and Model, had is that of a small child to its Father, one of complete dependence and absolute trust. Our Saviour told us this: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." There was a ship at sea during a typhoon. Everyone was terrified, except one little child, only 7 years old. He seemed to be enjoying it. Someone asked him: "Aren't you scared, son?" "No, he said, "I'm not scared. Why should I be scared? My daddy is the captain!"

When God calls Himself a father, it's not just a name, it's real, it's true! We have to realize that He is a father and really loves us.

Sure, sometimes His love shows itself in ways hard for us to understand—for instance, His plan for the world included permitting the sufferings of His Eldest Son. Just as a child will only understand after he's grown up why his loving father gave him bitter medicine when he was ill, so will we only understand in Heaven why God permits us to suffer. When we look at the back of a tapestry we have a very vague idea of the picture — it is only when we see the front side that we realize what is really depicted. In a similar way, only in Heaven will we see why His Fatherly love sometimes takes the form of a cross.

The father of St. Therese was a very kind gentle person. After he died, she used her happy memories of him to give her a faint idea of the kindness of God the Father. We should do the same — thinking of the best qualities of the most ideal father and try to realize that God loves us infinitely more than that. Our lives will be really changed when we come to realize that He is a Father and loves us intensely.

Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father, came to teach us about Him. The center of His teaching was that God is a loving Father. Every time He spoke of Him, He referred to Him as our Father. Every example He used to make us know God better was an example from the ways of an ideal Father.

Now, how is God a Father? First, by loving us intensely, immensely. Loving us so greatly that while we were still sinners and loathsome to God, He decided to share His life with us, which is the very idea of fatherhood. The Apostles had this problem: "Show us the Father" said Philip to Our Lord, "and it is sufficient for us." Listen to the answer: "He who sees Me, sees the Father also." All that is lovable in the character of Our Lord is a reflection of the loving fatherly heart of God.

God's fatherhood is also seen in His ambition for us His children. He has greater ambitions for us that's almost unbelievable — He wants us to be His children now and to sit enthroned with Christ at His right hand forever.

How does a good son treat his father? How should we act towards God? Christ, His Eldest Son and our Brother has told us: Do His will, be obedient, loving children of our wonderful Father.

A young man used to faithfully attend basketball practices. While not practising, he could be seen walking arm-in-arm with his father. One Saturday, he came without his father. He requested the coach to let him play on the team that day. The coach said: "You know you're not really ready for playing yet. I'll put you in at the beginning, since you want it so much, but I'll have to take you out later." He put the boy on the opening team, and he never did take him out. The boy played like a champion. After the game, the coach asked him: "What got into you today? You played magnificently." The boy answered: "You used to see my father with me at practice? Very few people know he was blind — that's why I guided him around. He was interested in all my interests and in my game. Well, he died last week. This afternoon was the first time he ever *saw* me play."

Let us remember our Loving Father, Who made us, Who gave us His own Life in Baptism, Who loves us and wants us to live with Him forever in His home. If we remember that He sees us and is most concerned about us, we'll surely live as good Christians, loving Him with our whole heart and prove that love by unselfish service of all His other children, our brother and sisters in Christ.

11TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (August 10)

BAPTISM

"By God's grace I am what I am" — Epistle

The most wonderful thing that ever happened to us in all our lives was when we were baptized. We don't remember it perhaps, but our parents do — they prepared a feast for the occasion. And God remembers it too — He can never forget that on that day we became His special child. "This is my beloved son," He said, "in whom I am well pleased." We were born as the child of our parents, sharing their life and love and their name. At Baptism we were reborn, this time as children of God, Sharing His life and love — princess and princesses with the right to use the Name of our new Father, God, the King. If one of these boys or young men here at Mass today were called to become a priest or a

bishop or even Pope in Rome, nothing more wonderful would ever happen to him than when he was baptized.

The first thing we must realize about our baptism is that we had absolutely nothing to do with its happening. It was a pure gift of God, not deserved by us at all. It was God Who called us in the beginning. If someone runs into a burning building to save a life, we say he must be a close friend. Why did God decide that Christ should die to share His life with us? St. Paul says: "Even for a good man one will scarcely die. In this we see the love of God, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." "Not as though we had first loved God, but God first loved us."

Only God's love for us makes us lovable. We would only be repulsive to God, except that His love first makes us worth loving at all. The prayers said when we were baptized stress this. Many, many times we were described as "His chosen one," "This called one" — the one whom God in His pure goodness and from no right of ours was called to share His Divine Life.

When did this love begin? Long before we were born, long before the first man existed, long before the world. If there was a line stretching from here to the sun representing Eternity, my life-time would not even be a particle of it. But, away at the beginning, God loves *me* and called me to share His life. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee." God chose us first, decided (out of millions of possible beings) that we would exist. He decided that we would not just have natural life, but share His own Divine Life (rather than so many others, who perhaps would have appreciated it more.)

The day of our baptism is a far more important day than our birthday, because it was then that we were born to a divine life. A merchant called, Leonides was away from home when his son Origen was born. When he came home and learned he had a son, he asked if the son had been re-born in baptism. When he heard that Origen was not just his son but God's as well, he knelt and worshipped the Divine Life being lived in his child. All of you parents can say that to your child after

its baptism. "Until now you were only my child. But now, you are also God's own child."

Each one of us can say with St. Paul in today's Reading: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain." How do we repay God's love? He told us Himself — by loving one another. "This is *My* commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Our love must be practical and effective, not merely a matter of words.

How will we do this? He will tell us. You know that the new Scripture readings for Mass are being published. In a very short time we'll be having them at Mass. We'll be having the *whole* of God's message. Let's open those ears of ours that were opened at Baptism (in a ceremony like the cure described in today's gospel) and *listen*. And our response will surely be a readiness to help each and all of our brothers in their spiritual and temporal needs. This is what Christianity is all about, this is what baptism implies. Thus will we thank our Father, God, for calling us to be His children, and giving us Christ for our Brother.

12TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (August 17)

GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN FOR US

"Our sufficiency is from God." — Epistle

When our first parents were created, they were perfectly happy. There were indeed many things which we know now that they did not know. They know nothing about automobile or electricity or television. But one thing they did know and could never forget — that God had made them His children. In a similar way, over and above their natural life, Adam and Eve had a share in God's life.

God's plan was that the first people, and then all their descendants, should share in His Divine life. They had no right to this — it was an entirely free gift of God. Once we have been born, you and I have a right to natural and human life. But no one has a right to Divine Life — it is a purely free gift of God. It was because of God's goodness and love that He freely wished to share His life.

The first people were supremely happy, closely united with God in an easy and holy friendship. The Bible describes it in these words: "God walked with them." They were constantly aware of His presence and His love.

Let's take a look at this Divine Life that God shares with us out of Love. It's quite beyond our natural powers. If you heard of a plant that moved around to find better soil or more sunshine or water, you would say, "That's beyond its nature." If you heard of a dog that studied in school, read books, told stories and laughed at jokes, you would say, "That's beyond its nature." If you heard of a man who could live without breathing, you would say, "Beyond his nature." Our sharing in the divine life is like that — it's something we could never really get by ourselves — only God can give it.

It's something very real, even though we can't see it, or touch it, or measure it. After all, you don't use a tape-measure to estimate a man's ambition. You don't use thermometer to test your love for someone. But our ambition, our love are very real — so is our sharing in the Divine Life.

It's the most precious gift we have. So important that God sent His Son to restore it to us after our first parents lost it. He told us the essential things, He came to give us this share in His own life: "I am come," He said, "that they may have life, and have it in abundance," — not our natural life (man had that before He came) but a participation in His own Divine Life. He described it as living water, a spring of living water, continually flowing to give this new kind of life, a superior kind, a supernatural kind of life. The Bible describes it this way: "We were saved by His grace, God raised us up and enthroned us in the heavenly realm." We remain human beings, yes, we retain our human life, we don't become God, but over and above our human life, we do live a divine life, our human life has a participation in God's Life added to it. "I live," says St. Paul, "now not I, but Christ lives in me." Said Our Lord, "Abide in Me I will dwell in you. As the branch of itself cannot bear fruit unless it is joined to the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing." Another time he said: "Whoever

loves Me, obeys, My teaching, and he will be loved by My Father, and we will come to him and dwell in him." Ultimately it will flower into everlasting life.

You've all heard of the Cursillo. Maybe you know some Cursillistas. You know how making the Cursillo can change a man's life. I'll tell you the secret of the Cursillo. For three days, a Christian studies intensely the nature of the Divine Life that in the beginning God intended all of us to share, and that Christ came to restore to us. After three days of intensive studying of this Divine Life, a Cursillista is convinced that he possesses something of immense value, and is resolved to treasure it, and hand it on to others with deep heartfelt love.

Today's Gospel, with the well-known story of the good Samaritan spells it out. Love God all the way, and your neighbor as yourself. And who is our neighbor? Anyone, *everyone* in our home, in our neighborhood, at our place of work, be he friend or enemy, who needs our help, a kindly word, a generous action, a service that will show what Christianity is. "Bear one another's burden and so fulfill the Law of Christ."

13TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (August 23)

GOD'S REVISED PLAN

"The law was meant to be temporary, pending the arrival of the Descendant of the promise." — Epistle

We cannot dwell too long or too gratefully on the Divine Life by which God wants us to live, now and forever. Our first parents were not forced to enjoy the Divine Life. We can't be forced to love anyone, even God. The possibility remained, with Adam, of refusing to love God. Instead of responding with love, man could respond with ungrateful rebellion.

This is just what Adam did. Delighted with the Divine Life which he shared, he thought. "This is very wonderful. If only I could have it from myself, independently of God." And in a gesture of pride, he rejected God. At that moment, Adam's participation in the divine life

ceased. He became dead, really dead, to the only kind of life worthy of the name life. His mad act cut himself off from the flow of Divine Life. He could still move, he could still walk, he still had a natural life. But the Divine Life in him was cut off completely.

And all of us, at that moment, died to the divine life. We have to see this from God's point of view. We were not born till thousand of years after Adam. But he was our representative, the head of mankind, his decision affected us all — we all died, says St. Paul, in Adam. These are the words St. Paul used: "One man sinned, and it brought condemnation on all." "A multitude, through one man's sin, became guilty. It was through one man that guilt came into the world, and since death came owing to guilt, death was handed on to all mankind by one man." The dead referred to is spiritual death — loss of the Divine Life.

The situation was utterly hopeless, because man living with a purely natural life, can do nothing whatever to get a life altogether beyond his powers. No more than a plant can escape a flood by running away, or a sick animal escape death by arranging for surgery to be done by another animal.

But God our Father was not to be frustrated. There and then, He thought of a wonderful plan. He would give us another chance. He promised there and then to send a Redeemer. Through his Redeemer, those who lived before His coming could again share the Divine Life. But we who were born after His coming, could share an even better life. Wonderful as was Adam's sharing in God's life, ours would be still more wonderful — it would be Christ's life, His risen life, His life in God that we would share. When we passed through the water of Baptism, we were born to a new life, Christ's Life, we became God's children and Christ's brother. At Mass, at the blessing of the water, which will be mixed with the wine and become Christ along with the wine, this prayer is said: "O God, you created human nature wonderfully. May we share His Divinity, Who became a sharer in our humanity, Jesus Christ."

In today's Mass, we consider God's promises to Adam, and then to Abraham. We consider the part of God's plan where He sent His

Son to be our Redeemer. We remember that God so loved the world as to send His only-begotten Son to redeem the world. His offering of Himself in loving obedience to the cross made up for our sins, and His Resurrection enabled Him to give us a share in His risen life. "By His stripes we were healed. All we like sheep had gone astray, everyone had turned into his own path, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our offenses."

The Bible says: "Forget not the kindness of thy surety, for he has given his life for thee." Some years ago in Manila, a blood-donor named Emilio Benavides, died while donating his blood to someone in desperate need. (Usually, this could not happen, as Doctors are most careful to check blood-donors first. But this was an emergency.) Now, do you think that the one who was saved by that blood ever forget Benavides?

Let's show how our gratitude to Our Saviour everyday of our lives, by loving God and generously working for the betterment of the world. May our every action be a dying to ourselves, and a rising to live, ever more and more alive, with the life of the Risen Christ.

Rather than the 9 who so quickly forgot to even say: "Thank You," let us like the cured Samaritan, remember God's goodness to us, and make every Mass a thanksgiving, every going to the Communion Banquet table a grateful remembering.

14TH SUNDAY PENTECOST (August 31)

GOD LOVES US PERSONALLY

"Your Heavenly Father knows you need all these things" — Gospel

God loves each one of us personally. You parents will understand this. Your love for your first-born was unique. And yet, no matter how many children you have had since, you have the same love for each of them without lessening your love for the first-born. God is our Father — He made us His children in Baptism. He is most con-

cerned about each of us, and most anxiously ambitious for us — see the destiny He has in store for us. When Christ our brother told us about His Father and ours, He made this abundantly clear. “Are not five sparrows sold for three farthings? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father. Fear not, you are worth more than many sparrows. Even the hairs of your head are numbered.” He used the example of God’s care for the birds and the flowers, then of a father giving food to his child to illustrate our heavenly Father’s concern for each one of us. In the prayer He officially taught us, Our Father, He stressed our Father’s interest, even in our daily food.

The Bible uses parallel love to illustrate this. God appeals to mother-love and says His love is much greater. “Shall a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on her child? Even so, I will not forget thee. I have graven thee in my hands.” The Prophet Osee puts these words in God’s lips: “When Israel was a child, I loved him. I it was Who taught him to walk, Who bound up his wounds, Who reached down to put food in his mouth, I it was Who took him up in My arms, even as one fondles an infant to his cheeks.” Think of that — the great God, Who is in need of no one, should describe Himself as treating us like small children, cuddling us to His cheeks.

The reason why some people stay away from Him is because they feel that God doesn’t care. There is a man down the street who will miss Mass today. He doesn’t realize that God wants him here, that God knows about himself, that God sees his very thoughts, and longs for his love.

Let us not think of God’s benefits to us as being divided or lessened by being given to many. God’s love is not like ours. He loves each one of us personally, as if there were no one else in the world. He sent his Son, not for me and a lot of other people taken together, but for me personally, individually, just as I am now. “He loved *me*,” says St. Paul, “and delivered Himself for me.” When we are all gathered here to join Christ our Brother in offering the Mass, each one of us is quite convinced that God is personally interested in our offering as He is in the offering of each of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our impression here is correct — each of us does have all of God’s love, just as each of us achieves Communion with the whole Christ (Head

and members) at the Altar rail, no matter how many others communicate at the same time. Only then will we give God the full response of our love when we realize that His love for each one of us is a personal one, and that what He wants from me is the love that no one else can give Him.

God never ceases to care for us, provide for us, protect us. He did not just create things in the beginning and leave them to themselves. Creation is not just an act done once for all by God in the beginning. It is a constant act by which God continues to care for all that He had made, especially men. The great love of God is expressed in His Providence, the care He extends to all His creatures. The greatest sign of this love is this — He has given Himself to us. He has sent His own Divine Son, Christ, to transform the world. In each of the formulas of the Eucharistic Prayer words like this are said to God the Father: "Through Christ our Lord, through Whom You are continually creating, making holy, giving life to and blessing all these good things." What are those good things? Everything we use and value in life. In many places, at the offertory procession, not just bread and wine, but the things we use every day are brought to the sanctuary and piled up near the altar for this blessing and reminder of how much God loves us in giving us Christ and with Him, all good things.

How dull our lives would be if nobody cared: There would truly be nothing worth living for. Let's realize that God cares — exceedingly. He made us. He made the world and everything in it out of love for us. At our baptism, He did not only placed us in the world He has sanctified for our lifespan — 70, 50, 30 years — but He also called us back to Him. Everything in our life — our work, our recreation, eating, sleeping, suffering, should be a step back to God. Until in the end, the soul, having reached full stature, flings itself with a joyful cry into the arms of our loving Father, and is welcomed home.

Let's not stumble into, Eternity. Let's not go to a God we've never really known. Let's tell Him we love Him, and will prove it by constant, self-forgetting love of others.