



Proclaiming God's Fatherhood

by Curtis A. Martin

“Accepting the fact that God has revealed Himself to us as Father does not mean that He is like human fathers, but rather that we have been called to be like Him.”

Last year I had the opportunity to visit Auckland, New Zealand. During my visit, I was invited to be a guest on New Zealand National Radio. The host, a well-informed, intelligent woman—and a committed feminist—was very critical of the Catholic Church. During the interview she asked, “When are you Catholics going to get with the times and stop using outdated language to refer to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Don’t you realize that this kind of language is offensive and only leads people away from the Church?”

“You’re exactly wrong,” I responded. “The Church’s success does not depend upon its *timeliness*, but upon its *timelessness*. Truth doesn’t change. And in fact, it is the integrity and the consistency of the Catholic Church that is drawing tens of thousands of people into its heart.”

Establishing Trust

Recently, my 3-year-old daughter was suffering from a sore throat. She asked me for help. I brought her into the kitchen and got out the medicine. I poured some into a teaspoon and said, “Here sweetheart. Just swallow this.” She looked up to me with her beautiful, innocent eyes and said, “But Daddy, it hurts to swallow.”

Her words struck my fatherly heart, and I realized that my request must have seemed completely illogical to her little mind. How could swallowing help her when it was swallowing that was causing her pain? I pulled her up onto my lap, looked deep into her eyes, and said,

“Sweetheart, do you trust me?” She said, “Yes Daddy.” I said, “Then please take the medicine.” And with that, she downed the spoonful and her throat began to feel better within a few minutes.

Like my daughter, the feminist raised a good question. How can we say that God is Father? After all, fathers—men—seem to be the problem. If Christianity is going to respond effectively to this question, we have to gain the feminists’ trust, just as I gained the trust of my daughter.

Restoring the Family

Accepting the fact that God has revealed Himself to us as Father does not mean that He is like human fathers, but rather that we have been called to be like Him. This calling is at the heart of the Gospel and provides a very real solution to one of the greatest problems in human history: the fact that men fail to live up to their noble vocation.

Hundreds of years before Jesus Christ taught us to pray “Our Father,” the prophet Malachi warned us about the importance of fatherhood. In the last two verses of Old Testament prophecy, Malachi writes:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. *And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers*, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (Mal. 4:5-6).

With these words Old Testament prophecy ceases until the time of Christ.

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Malachi speaks of a restoration of the hearts of fathers to their children and children to their fathers. And so in the fullness of time, God the Father sends His Son, the new Adam, to restore the human family to God's original plan (cf. Lk. 1:17; Gal. 4:4-6).

In the beginning, God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness . . ." (Gen. 1:26). We were created in God's image and likeness, but through sin, we have lost His likeness. God created us male and female in a family. The family in a certain sense is the first image of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our fallen condition, we have continued to live in families, but without the love, without our hearts' being set on one another. Christ came to heal this brokenness.

God designed the family to be the center of love and life. But because of sin, it is frequently the place where we find heartache and sorrow. The feminists' answer—and you don't have to be a woman to embrace radical feminism—is to do away with the family. Christ's response is to restore it. The book of Malachi has only four short chapters, but it provides a blueprint for the restoration that Christ finally brings, a restoration that our families deeply need.

Statistics consistently point to the absence of fathers from the home as the single most destructive factor in our culture today. This is precisely the issue at hand when we acknowledge the uniquely Christian revelation of God as Father.

So the feminists are right. The failure of fathers is a fundamental problem in our culture. But their logic needs to be tempered by trust and wisdom. Just as my daughter was right to question how swallowing something could help when it was swallowing that hurt, the feminist is justified in asking how acknowledging God's fatherhood can be the solution when fatherhood seems to be the problem. But as logical as the feminist position may be, it lacks wisdom. And it is up to us to gain their trust through the witness of our own family lives, so that we can point the way toward the fullness of truth.

The prophet Malachi goes to the heart of the problem:

"You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and with groaning because he no longer regards the offer-

ing or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. . . . Let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. *For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel*" (Mal. 2:13-16).

How do we overcome the scourge of divorce that is all around us? Here again, the fatherhood of God provides the solution. Salvation history provides the example of God's faithfulness even when we were not faithful to Him. Throughout the centuries humanity has turned its back on God over and over again, but He has never given up on us.

This is the power of the Gospel, that following the example of the Father's faithful love, Christ the Son has won for us redemption, so that we can be restored as children of God. He has given to us the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the Church to enable us to respond faithfully to this invitation.

Testing the Lord

God challenges us to give ourselves generously to Him, trusting that He will provide for us in all things. Throughout the Bible we are commanded not to put the Lord Our God to the test. Yet there is one exception, and it's given in Malachi's prophecy:

"Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; *and thereby put me to the test*, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing" (Mal. 3:10).

Malachi challenges us to bring our first and best to God. The traditional practice of tithing, giving the first 10 percent of what we receive back to God, is both the first step and a model of how the rest of our life should be ordered. We cannot please God on our own. But if we give ourselves to Him completely, He will give us the grace to be able to please Him in very practical ways, such as by loving our wives and our children and allowing the lordship of Christ to reach every aspect of our lives. We simply must turn to God the Father, and receive His Holy Spirit, so that we might truly be His sons and daughters. ■

From Our Founder

I think it is very important for us to learn to do two things at once: to do all we can to withstand the bad trends and to encourage the good ones and, at the same time, to avoid all worry and upset by putting the problem back, each evening, into the almighty hands of God. The Holy Church is His Church; He will save it; and it is only a gift He offers us, that He deigns to invite our cooperation in His work.

H. Lyman Stebbins
February 25, 1969