

The new worship of the Father

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In John's Gospel, Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, announces a new devotion: "*The hour is coming and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father also seeks such to adore him*" (Jn 4,23). From that moment on adoration takes on a new aspect: in the Judaic religion, in fact, it required a detachment, with sentiments of fear, whereas Jesus emphasizes that the Father is very close to us; he who is adored is a Father, who desires to be very close to His own children and wants them to trust in Him. For this reason Jesus, who could have spoken of the adoration of the true God, prefers to describe the new worship as adoration of the Father.

Adoration of the Father

Adoration must be inspired by a filial affection. Therefore it is adoration in spirit and in truth. Jesus explains that it is not connected with a national shrine: "*Woman, believe me that the hour is coming when you shall neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, adore the Father*" (Jn 4,21). Therefore this new worship will not find its meaning in exterior buildings, but in a spiritual attitude which will express the person's sincere commitment. The Father does not want exterior and superficial offerings, but the gift of one's heart and one's spirit. Since the worship is no longer confined to a local shrine, it will thus be able to be manifested in a more universal way. The Father is the Father of all men; therefore it is all humanity who is called not only to adore God, but to give itself to the one whom it acknowledges as Father and who sees His children united in love. The same filial love which inspires adoration is thus inseparable from a fraternal love which surpasses every distance and every boundary. Following this general statement on the new adoration, the Samaritan woman is invited to offer a new worship which on her behalf requires a conduct which is more consistent with the divine precepts. She can no longer merely participate in an outward worship without a commitment from the heart: only her conversion can allow her to truly adore the Father. According to the Gospel passage, it seems as though this conversion has taken place and that the woman has left, along with the pitcher of water with which she went to the well, all of her past life in order to receive this living water.

Adoration in spirit and in truth

Adoration in spirit and in truth means, therefore, acceptance of the Father's will, with an obedience that strives to imitate Jesus' obedience: "*My food is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work*" (Jn 4,34). Moreover, this adoration can only be manifested in a total trust in the Father's love. It is the most sincere response to the infinite kindness which distinguishes the Father's behaviour. Such kindness excludes

the anxieties which often increase in life. The Father's care will give us all that is necessary or useful for our daily lives. The Father knows our needs and He reveals Himself full of care in order to protect us from evil. Thus in this trust in His fatherly love, an atmosphere of peace and joy develops in our souls. The adoration of the Father in spirit and in truth is thus accomplished also as an act of thanksgiving. The Father's generosity, which is revealed with a multitude of benefits, must be acknowledged by our thanksgiving; instead, too often we do not give Him the thanksgiving He deserves! We know how Jesus was hurt when He saw only one of the ten lepers He healed come back to thank Him and give glory to God (Lk 17,15-19). The sons of the Father cannot ignore the gifts they receive every day; they must acknowledge the signs of the Father's kindness and give Him sincere praise for the extent of His love. By following the example of Christ, who in an act of thanksgiving offered the sacrifice of the Last Supper and shared its fruits in the Eucharistic, Christians are invited to extend the act of thanksgiving by offering their own self and their own work to the Father for the growth of His kingdom.

Towards a liturgical feast?

The absence of a feast dedicated to the Father in the liturgical calendar bears witness to the fact that the worship of the Father still hasn't reached its full development. During the year there are feasts dedicated to Christ in memory of numerous events of the work of salvation, the feast of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Trinity, the feasts dedicated to Our Lady and those dedicated to numerous saints. However, there is no particular feast dedicated to the Father: Unlike the other two divine persons, the Father isn't celebrated with a feast dedicated only to Him. People sometimes try to justify the absence of such a feast by saying that the Father is venerated during the whole year in the liturgy. But this statement is also true for Christ and the Holy Spirit, who nonetheless have their own feasts. Therefore we note this paradox: the Father, who is the origin of the whole work of salvation and has instituted the entire foundation of the liturgy, is not personally celebrated by this liturgy. He who has the right to be celebrated before the other persons is not honoured with a particular feast.

The number of special feasts dedicated to the saints has continued to grow, but until now there is no feast day dedicated especially to the Father. We have observed that the new worship which Jesus began consists of adoring the Father: and yet there is no day in which this adoration is directed more particularly to the person of the Father.

This observation is all the more surprising when we see in today's humanity a growing conviction of the importance of fatherhood. Father's day is celebrated in families: many feel the need to recognize the merits of fathers and to thank them. Even Christians, who value the importance of fatherhood along with motherhood, do not venerate with a special feast He who is the source of every fatherhood and every motherhood.

Let us proclaim a feast day for the Father

In the past there were attempts to introduce a feast of the Father. In the XVII century, for example, in 1684 the king of Spain Charles II started a petition in Rome in order to

obtain, at least for Spain or for the whole Church, the institution of a special feast dedicated to the Father.

In 1694 about thirty bishops subscribed to this petition.

A certain number of Congregations of the Father were founded and they desired to celebrate this feast; the celebration had already been introduced in Tarazona, Spain and in Tours, France; however, the petition was not accepted by the Congregation of rites.

When today we think about the objections made against this feast, we have difficulty understanding how it can be a serious obstacle. One of the objections was based on the novelty of the feast, a novelty which could bother people and therefore it had to be discarded: the wisdom of the elders was sufficient. Accepting this objection would mean prohibiting the introduction of any new development into the liturgy.

There was also the objection of the danger of recognizing a plurality of gods: a special feast dedicated to the Father could have created some confusion on the One and Triune God, giving the idea of a kind of other God, being a divine Person distinct from the others. Such an objection could be made against all the particular feasts of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In reality, the danger of polytheism doesn't exist, and the feasts of the Persons of the Trinity can be celebrated without this concern.

An argument against the feast also came from the principle that liturgical feasts had to be celebrated to commemorate a particular event of the work of salvation: in the case of the Father, there is no such event. It is easy to respond that the feast of the Holy Trinity is not connected to a particular event.

Moreover, the Father intervened with His supreme initiative in all the events of the saving work and He cannot be considered extraneous to the fulfilment of His divine plan of humanity's redemption. He is also the first promoter of the entire liturgy. Precisely, because He is the initiator of all the work of salvation and the ultimate end of the journey of redeemed humanity, the Father should be celebrated. The liturgy must follow the essential movement which characterizes the journey and the worship of Christ, which goes from the Father to the Father.

The object of the feast and the choice of a date

The attempts to introduce a feast dedicated to the Father suggested a celebration dedicated to the eternal Father. There is no difficulty venerating the Father as eternal Father, but the title arouses some reservations. The eternal Father means: the Father considered in His eternal life, while the Father whom Jesus called "Abbà" was the one who from eternity drew closer to earthly life by sending us His Son. This Father who is close to us is the one whom the risen Jesus proclaimed as "your Father" or the one whom we call "our Father" in our prayers, and whom we are called to celebrate. The desirable feast would be, instead: "*feast of our Father*", or "*feast of the Father*" intended in the meaning of our Father. It is not an abstract figure of the Father, but a concrete Father, as Jesus Himself revealed and professed Him.

The choice of a date could give rise to various suggestions; this choice must take into account the whole liturgical cycle. We can recall the date chosen by the Congregations of the eternal Father, in Spain; the fifth Sunday after Easter. The fourth or fifth Sunday would in fact offer the possibility of establishing a Trinitarian development at the end

of Easter time: after the feast of the Father, the feast of Christ in the Ascension, the feast of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and finally, the feast of the Holy Trinity.

The importance of the feast of the Father

The feast of the Father must be accepted as a very important feast for fatherhood and motherhood. We have already pointed out the connections between Mary's motherhood and the Father's fatherhood: Mary's motherhood is the most similar and most moving image of the fatherly love of the Father. We can add that every human motherhood, as every fatherhood, is made in the likeness of the supreme fatherhood of the Father.

Every fatherhood comes from the Father: every father is called to reproduce the face of the heavenly Father. From the Father comes every motherhood as well.

We cannot forget that the most sublime manifestations of maternal love mysteriously descend from the fatherly and motherly heart of the Father. In this way we can understand that the feast of the Father gives father's day and mother's day their most authentic value.

Moreover, this feast could have a very vast propagation because it has ecumenical value. It is the feast of a Father who extends His love to all men. The prayer of the "Our Father" is the prayer par excellence of ecumenical meetings and it can be adopted by all: the feast of the Father would therefore have a universal propagation.