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God, the Father

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AS Catholics we know that all that Christ teaches through His Church is important. But it would not be correct to say that every doctrine the Church teaches is of equal importance. It would be a sad state of affairs, indeed it would be criminal, were the Church to give more prominence to the doctrine of Purgatory than to the doctrine of Christ’s death on the Cross.

Both are real doctrines, but one is more important than the other. Catholics do not generally neglect or undervalue Christ’s death on the Cross, but there is one doctrine of importance of very great importance, to which we do not give sufficient attention—a doctrine which, to use a fragmentary phrase, fathers and sons can understand but not understand the importance of.

We can gain some insight into the place of pre-eminence God the Father should hold in our thinking and praying by learning how Christ thought of His Father. If the Father was often in His mind, if His name was often on His lips, then the question is settled. The Father is important. It is the Father we adore.

Our Lord lives through the Father, and goes to the Father. He was the Father’s love and He was the Father’s work. He lived in the Father, He had been in the Father, and He went to the Father. He is God, should be more than adored. He should be loved, loved not as a kindly phantom from above, but precisely as Father. Father implies nearness, understanding, love, concern.

But for the Apostles, the Father was a God apart, so above and beyond the flesh of man and its cares that the adoration they offered Him was the prostration of the fearful. Their adoration was a submission to power rather than a surrender to love.

If Our Lord was to lead them to the Father, He would have to bring the Father close to them. They would have to understand. He would have to tell them that the Father was pure spirit, that He was before time and above time, that He transcended the heavens by the terror of His loveliness. But that would not be enough. Our Lord would have to make the Apostles understand that the Father would not be Father were He a sort of spiritualized volcano, ready and eager to erupt, or were He a pleasant old grandfather who is remotely paternal but basically unconcerned. Fear the Apostles understood, and trembling they understood. What man did not? But most of all they understood love. And it is in terms of love that Our Lord explained the Father to them.

"Father Himself loves you." This they understood.

A difficulty remained for them, however, and it remains for us. We are happy to know that the Father loves us, but for our part we can love the Father intimately only if we know Him intimately. The Father has never taken on a human body. Since we can love only what we first know, how can we love the Father unless we can in some manner see Him? Philip had a similar difficulty, and he made a bold request: "Lord, show us the Father; that is all we ask." Our Lord turned and said: "Philip, he who sees Me sees also the Father." This is not an evasion answer. It is truth as ever as truth can be. Christ is the Perfect Son of a Perfect Father. Christ is the Perfect Image of His Father.

For this reason Christ can say in all literalness, "He who sees Me sees the Father also." To know Christ is to know the Father.

CHRISTIAN consciousness has always considered the "Our Father" the prayer of prayers. That is why Father Faber wrote: "The devotion to the Father is the devotion of devotion. There is little daring and no novelty in this assertion. It is an old, old truth whose neglect will take its revenge. There will be great holes in our Catholicity and an immeasurable void in our holiness. We shall have missed the true Philip put so well: "Show us the Father, and it is enough."