

Fr. John's Homily for August 7, 2022 the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

CHS JMJ

God the Father

Intro The prophetic role of the pastor/preacher.

Today is the unofficial feast day of *God the Father*. By unofficial I mean that the Universal Catholic Church has not recognized it as such. But, it is the result of a private revelation to a nun back in the 1930s in Europe. It was approved by the local bishop in Grenoble, France and since then, growing numbers of pastors around the world have begun to celebrate it, myself being one of them. The unofficial title of the devotion seems to be: *The Father Speaks to His Children*.

But I would like to tell you why I celebrate it. When I arrived here 15 years ago, there was a reception after my first Sunday Masses and a number of people stopped by to welcome me. One fellow came up to me with his briefcase. He laid it on the table, opened it up and proceeded to hand me stuff... papers, articles, documents, pamphlets. Basically He was saying, "Fr. John, welcome to Holy Spirit, but this is what you will need to know about in order to be a good pastor here at your new parish."

Well, OK. This type of thing happens all the time. People have agendas and projects and they want to share it and promote it to others. I thanked him and later that night dutifully perused the stack of papers, but I settled on one that caught my attention. And that is the one we celebrate today and I have done it every year for 15 years.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about the origins of this devotion. It is alleged that back in the 1930's that God the Father appeared to an Italian nun named Sr. Eugenia Ravasio. She is one of those powerhouse personalities who despite coming from poverty and with very little education, was very smart and had great leadership skills. She was something like Mother Cabrini, a woman of many talents and of multiple accomplishments, including contributing to the cure of leprosy. And, like St. Damian of Molokai, she established Leper communities, but in Africa.

In any case, God the Father appeared to her, and by way of introduction took off His crown and put it on the ground, and took upon His lap, a globe. He sat down next to her and said some things that were meant to be shared with the rest of us. I'll share just a few things.

First off, He said that for any sinner who simply calls upon the name of the Father, mercy will be administered. That person will not lose their salvation. The second thing is that He desired a feast day. He was pretty flexible but He said that if it was on a Sunday, it should be the first Sunday of August. And so there you have it. That is why we are celebrating God the Father on this day.

We celebrate to honor Him, to praise Him, and to give thanks to Him, the first person of the Blessed Trinity, *The Great I AM*, despite the fact that every Mass is offered to Him, through His Son Jesus, the Christ. Remember, it is not just a meal, it is *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*. Jesus is offered up to the Father as the spotless Lamb of God. And there are certainly plenty of examples within the Mass itself to bear witness to this truth. The various Prefaces, for instance, always start the same way... They are addressed to the

Father, through Jesus. Here is the opening of the preface for Eucharistic prayer number 2, “*It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere, to give you thanks, Father most holy, through your beloved son, Jesus Christ.*” And then there are the Eucharistic prayers themselves. Same thing. Eucharistic prayer number 1 begins by saying, “... *To you, therefore, most merciful Father, we make humble prayer and petition, through Jesus Christ your son.* And then, of course, we have *The Lord’s Prayer*. The prayer Jesus gave us to pray directly to His Father, and ours. “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*” And don’t forget that the *Chaplet of Mercy* is a prayer directed to the Father. “*Eternal Father, we offer you the body and blood, soul and divinity, of your dearly beloved son.....*”

But in addition to all of this peripheral information about the devotion, I thought we should say something about the true essence of the Father. He is the architect of the universe. He works in conjunction with His son, the builder. (I wonder if there is a connection with the fact that Jesus was a carpenter.) But the Father is The Creator; Creator, “*ex nihilo*”, meaning everything He creates, He creates from nothing. He speaks things into being. That is incredible. Mind-blowing!

A few weeks ago on our bulletin cover there was an image of the hand of God with an artist’s paintbrush, the tip of which was on this globe we call our planet earth. He is painting. He is designing. He is making things. He had a very big job – there is so much stuff down here. There is so much stuff throughout the universe. So much diversity. So much beauty. So much mystery. God is the architect/designer of everything. And really, everything comes down to this, that we believers say that everything comes from something, while non-believers say everything comes from nothing. Well, which one is it? As I like to point out, Maria von Trapp hit the nail on the head in *The Sound of Music*. It was actually Julie Andrews in her late night encounter in the gazebo with the Captain, when she sang these words: “*Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could.....*” Yeah, she got it right!

God the Father is pure spirit. He doesn’t have a physical body like His son, Jesus. So He doesn’t have gender per se, not male or female, but nevertheless is identified as... Father. A good generic definition of a father is *one who generates life*.

I found that the concept of the fatherhood of God is actually pretty light in the Old Testament. There are several allusions that set the groundwork for the New Testament. It wasn’t until Jesus that the idea of God as our Father, our Abba, really begins to take on flesh. Jesus often spoke of His relationship with His...Father.

So it is easy to see why He has been depicted artistically, down through the ages, as a male. Mostly as an old man, with a gray beard, and in some cases even balding. That is why the icon that you saw up here, which is a representation of how He appeared to sister Eugenia, seems a bit unusual. He actually looks young and more like Jesus.

And I guess this really is part of the mystery. We think about this stuff from time to time in our quiet moments. Perhaps it is the Holy Spirit who is encouraging a little bit of meditation and contemplation.

Will the Church ever establish this as a major feast of the liturgical year? Well I have no inside information on that, but I think it is good that we have this day to help us think

more about our relationship with our Father and Creator. He is very mysterious. It is only through His son that we get to know something about His character. As the scripture says, from St. Paul, *“In Jesus are found all the attributes of the Godhead...in bodily form”*.

I will close with one more interesting passage from the New Testament Gospel of Matthew. Again, this is Jesus speaking. It is actually a prayer addressed to His Father. *“I thank you Father, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the child-like. Such has been your gracious will. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.”*

That bishop in France, after studying the story of Sister Eugenia, said that this is a genuine private revelation and worthy of being considered. And according to that passage, Jesus chose to reveal the Father to good sister Eugenia.

And so, maybe that could be a prayer of ours. Would you like to meet the Father? Would you like to see His face? Would you like to get to know Him better? Ask His Son for an introduction.

~Fr. John