



38. Childlikeness and Friendship with God

The structure of the covenant provides the basis for the whole of creation. God has created everything in order to “covenant” to himself beings outside himself who are endowed with mind and soul. In this covenant relationship he invites human beings to co-operate with him responsibly: to mould creation for the good of humankind, and to develop it so that it can arrive at the destiny for which it was designed.

In the previous chapters we explained the fundamental structure of the covenant and showed through the choice of texts how it has been realised in practice in Schoenstatt’s spirituality, that is, in a Marian way.

It follows from this fundamental structure that people ask how they should live and work with God: How are they to recognise God’s will – faith in Divine Providence – and how can they respond to it – everyday sanctity?

The disposition to heed Divine Providence and respond to it is innate to human nature, and hence finds expression not just in the various religions, but also in magic and superstition. This already indicates that the attitude of human beings to God’s offer of a covenant is not automatically and always positive. The God who wants to work together with human beings in a covenant of love can well seem to them to be a God who punishes and (only) controls them, who pursues and damns them.

In order to be able to respond to God’s offer correctly, human beings have to arrive at a positive fundamental relationship to God. How this happens and is to happen – according to the teaching on secondary causes – cannot be dealt with here. However, the nature of this fundamental relationship, as it is meant to be, is reflected in the following text: We may and should be children and friends of God.

The text is taken from “Everyday Sanctity” – Cf. introduction to Text 40.

God is our Father

The Triune God has set up his throne in the graced soul and works there as a Father. He – our Father, we – his children! St Paul emphasises this repeatedly, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption by which we call out ‘Abba, Father!’”¹⁷³ St John also tells us, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.”¹⁷⁴ So we really and truly can say that God is our Father.

Let us consider for a moment what the word “Father” implies. We have to distinguish between three things.

“Father”, in the narrowest sense of the word, implies that we have received life through procreation. We human beings receive our human nature by being begotten by our parents. God’s Son also received his divine nature through being begotten. The Father in heaven begot him in eternity and continues to beget him for all eternity. To address God as “Father” in this narrowest sense is, therefore, the sole prerogative of the only begotten Son of God.

“Father”, in the widest sense of the word, is a name given to anyone who is as good as a father to me, who cares for me like a father. In this sense God is the loving Father of all human beings, including the sinners and unbaptised, that is, all his creatures without exception. He clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the heavens.

There is still a “Father” in a wider sense, that is, an adoptive father. He accepts the child of someone else as his own, giving that child his name and letting him or her share in all he has, in his rights, making that child the heir of his possessions. Am I an adopted child of God in this sense? Yes! In his mercy he accepted me as his child, I may bear his name, I may share in his riches, he has made me an heir of heaven.

However, I am and have more than this. At this point a great mystery begins, one which we cannot fathom with our limited human minds. Our great heavenly Father gives us what a human adoptive father can never give his child: a share in his divine life. As a result he makes us his supernatural image and likeness. In the natural order adopted children can never become ontologically like their adoptive father, because they have received another blood and genetic inheritance. We, however, through being accepted as God’s children, become like God, united to God in a wonderful way, and enabled to see God face to face in eternity. “His divine power,” St Peter tells us, “has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus through these things he has given us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature.”¹⁷⁵ There is no comparison to this form of fatherhood in the natural order.

So I am in very truth a child of God; I can place myself next to our Lord and call the great ruler of heaven and earth “my beloved Father”. Yet I have not been begotten as his child, as has Christ, but through a wholly unmerited gift.

¹⁷³ Cf. Ro 8, 15.

¹⁷⁴ 1 Jn 3,1.

¹⁷⁵ 2 Pet 1, 3f.

And this Father loves me with fatherly love. When I call out “Abba, dear Father”, he answers with his divine “*Fili, filia* – dear child!” He himself tells us through the Prophets that he loves us with fatherly warmth, indeed with motherly tenderness,

“Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.”¹⁷⁶

How little we people of today, even we Christians, know about this consoling truth! How else could we feel so abandoned and alone, and go from door to door begging for help and consolation, and forgetting our heavenly Father! Don’t children go to their father when they are in need? And, just because children are small and helpless, don’t they awaken all their father’s willingness to help and joy in giving? God our Father is the One who wants to communicate himself, he wants to give himself in love, and loves by giving, because he is Love itself. As an expression of his great willingness to love, he breathes out the Holy Spirit. This strong, communicative force, however, gave him not rest. He united his Son with a graced human nature. The Father, we might almost say, is not prepared to be without a child, without as many children as possible. He is Love, so he wants to communicate himself.

“*Deus quaerit condiligentes se*”.¹⁷⁷ God wants spiritual beings he can love, and who with him love what and how he loves. So he allowed his only begotten Son to become Man, and through baptism incorporates us into him. We have in very truth become his children.

God the Father has a strange “weakness”: He cannot withstand the recognised and acknowledged helplessness of his child. Childlikeness means the “powerlessness” of our great God, and the “omnipotence” of the little human being. This is the deepest reason for the fruitfulness of humility in God’s kingdom. In her Magnificat, the Blessed Mother jubilantly sang, “He exalts the lowly”,¹⁷⁸ and our Lord confirmed his Mother’s words repeatedly when he said, “Those who humble themselves will be exalted”,¹⁷⁹ and, “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave”.¹⁸⁰

God is our Friend

However, our great Triune God does not want only our childlike love, he wants to have every form of our love, including our friendship, and ultimately attach it to himself. He is within us as our divine Friend. “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends”.¹⁸¹ This is what God has said, and he wants to be taken literally. Since, however, friendship presupposes equality in nature – for example, it is impossible to talk about friendship between an animal and a human being – he shares with us some of

¹⁷⁶ Is 49,15.

¹⁷⁷ A saying of Duns Scotus (ca. 1265-1308). Cf. Duns Scotus, Ord. III., dist. 28, q. unica, n.2 (Editio Vivès, XV, 378b-379a).

¹⁷⁸ Lk 1,52.

¹⁷⁹ Lk 14, 11.

¹⁸⁰ Mt 20, 26f.

¹⁸¹ Jn 15,15f.

his divine life. So, although we are not dealing here with actual equality, otherwise we would be gods, there is a certain created similarity; it is sufficient to enable us to communicate as friends.

In genuine friendship God exchanges his treasures with me. He gives me his Son and his Holy Spirit. He allows me to share in his Son's task and mission, and his Son solemnly entrusted his Mother to me from the Cross.

However, my divine Friend also wants my treasures. I possess only one thing – my free will, my love. I may and must offer it to him as a gift of friendship. What does our Lord say? "Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."¹⁸² We would never have dared to seek such a wonderful familiarity unless he, our divine Friend, had offered it to us. He invites me to his table, and speaks to me through his teaching and inspirations, just as a good friend does.

This is how her Sisters questioned Clara, the great saint of the 13th century, when she returned to them from her meditations, "What new things can you tell us from God?" They knew that he had spoken to her.

Those people who cultivate friendship with their indwelling Triune God will discover any number of related truths that remain hidden from other people. They will also repeatedly receive new motivation to do things as a fruit of this friendship. Unfortunately the noise of the world often deafens us so badly that it is easy to overhear the voice of our Friend and his knocking.

Everyday saints are fine of hearing and open towards God. Human voices and the noise at work are unable to drown out the language of their divine Friend. It rings through everywhere, just as children know their mother's voice and hear it despite the noises of the street.

¹⁸² Rev 3,20.