



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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God the Father's love is demanding

1. God the Father's love for us cannot leave us indifferent, but seeks to be reciprocated with a constant commitment to love. This commitment takes on an ever deeper meaning the closer we draw to Jesus, who fully lives in communion with the Father, making himself a model for us.

In the cultural context of the Old Testament, paternal authority is absolute and is used as a term of comparison to describe the authority of God the Creator, who may not be contested. In Isaiah we read: "Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?'" , or to a woman, "With what are you in travail?". Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?" (Is 45:10f.). A father also has the task of guiding his son and severely reprimanding him, if necessary. The Book of Proverbs recalls that this is also true of God: "The Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prv 3:12; cf. Ps 103 [102]:13). The prophet Malachi, for his part, attests to God's compassionate affection for his children (Mal 3:17), but his is always a demanding love: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel" (Mal 4:4).

2. The law God gives his people is not a burden imposed by a tyrannical master, but the expression of that fatherly love which shows the right path for human conduct and the condition for inheriting the divine promises. This is the sense of Deuteronomy's injunction: "You shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land" (Dt 8:5-7). Inasmuch as it ratifies the covenant between God and the children of Israel, the law is dictated by love. But to transgress it is not without

consequences, bringing painful results which are nevertheless always governed by the logic of love, because they compel man to take salutary note of a constitutive dimension of his being. "It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him" (CCC, n. 1432).

If he separates himself from the Creator, man necessarily falls under the power of evil, death and nothingness. On the contrary, obedience to God is the source of life and blessing. This is what the Book of Deuteronomy stresses: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it" (Dt 30:15f.).

3. Jesus does not abolish the law in regard to its fundamental values, but perfects it, as he himself says in the Sermon on the Mount: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Mt 5:17).

Jesus identifies the heart of the law with the precept of love and develops its radical demands. Broadening the Old Testament precept, he commands us to love friends and enemies, and explains this extension of the precept by referring to God's fatherhood: "So that you may be sons of the Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:43-45; cf. CCC, n. 2784).

A qualitative leap occurs with Jesus: he sums up the law and the prophets in a single norm, as simple in its formulation as difficult in its practice: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Mt 7:12). This is also presented as the way to be perfect as our heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:48). Whoever acts in this way bears witness before men so that they may give glory to the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:16), and is ready to receive the kingdom he has prepared for the just, in accordance with Christ's words at the last judgement: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34).

4. While he proclaims the Father's love, Jesus never fails to recall that it is a demanding love. This feature of God's face can be seen in all of Jesus' life. His "food" is precisely to do the will of the One who sent him (cf. Jn 4:34). Precisely because he is not seeking his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him into the world, his judgement is just (cf. Jn 5:30). Therefore the Father bears witness to him (cf. Jn 5:37) and so do the Scriptures (cf. Jn 5:39). It is above all the works he does in the Father's name which guarantee that he has been sent by him (cf. Jn 5:36; 10:25, 37-38). The greatest of these is the offering of his own life, as the Father commanded him: this gift of self is even the reason why the Father loves him (cf. Jn 10:17-18) and is the sign that he loves the Father (cf. Jn 14:31). If the law of Deuteronomy was already a path and guarantee of life, the law of the New Testament is so in an unprecedented and paradoxical way, expressed in the

commandment to love one's brothers and sisters to the point of giving one's life for them (cf. Jn 15:12-13).

The ultimate reason for the "new commandment" of love, as St John Chrysostom recalls, is found in God's love: "You cannot call the God of all kindness your Father if you preserve a cruel and inhuman heart; for in this case you no longer have in you the marks of the heavenly Father's kindness" (Hom. in illud "Angusta est porta": PG 51, 44B). In this perspective there is continuity and transcendence: the law is transformed and deepened as the law of love, the only one worthy of the fatherly face of God.

I extend a special greeting to the newly ordained Deacons from the Pontifical Irish College and the Pontifical Scots College: may God strengthen and guide you in your ministry of grace and hope. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Saviour.