

EDITORIAL

"Our Father, who art in heaven . . ." After He had gone up the Mount to preach to His people, the Savior continued with a simple discourse on prayer. When He had told His hearers to emulate neither the hypocrites who prayed standing on the street corners in order to be seen, nor the Gentiles who prayed in verbose, drawn out formulas, the Christ told His people how they should pray: "In this manner therefore shall you pray: Our Father. . . ."

The first point presented by the Teacher Who is wiser than Solomon is the fatherly character of God. This is a concept pregnant with profound insights; it has been enough to occupy the prayer life of saints for whole lifetimes; and it expresses, in a way, Christ's own relation to the Father. It tells us many things about God, and about ourselves.

Corresponding to the different modes of God's fatherhood are the different modes of our sonship. Arising from our multiple relation to God are several obligations on our part. God is our Father because He has created us in His own image and likeness, making our souls like Himself. This imaging is enjoyed only by intellectual creatures. God, as father, governs us by His ever-ruling and all-pervading providence. Although He cares for every single existing thing, He exercises a special care for His sons, for He rules us in such a way as to allow us to freely rule ourselves in conformity with His laws. In this way, we are true masters of our future and of ourselves, but other things are more determined in their obedience to His decrees and commandments, and consequently not truly masters of themselves. Further, God has adopted us as His sons. He has given other creatures only trifling gifts in comparison to our adoption, because to the son goes the inheritance, as St. Paul points out: "and if sons, heirs also" (Rom. 8: 15).

Since we are sons of God, we owe our Father honor. We honor Him by the praise of our lips and hearts, by the purity of our bodies, and by acting justly in relation to our neighbors. We owe our Father imitation



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which we can show by loving Him sincerely, by showing mercy to others since mercy follows on love, and by being perfect, according to the words of the divine Master: "Be you perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5: 48). We owe Him obedience since He is Lord of all; we owe it by reason of His example since His Son became obedient, even to the death of the cross. Finally, we should be patient while we accept His corrective discipline. In addition, we must love and revere even our neighbor since we are all children of the same Father.

As God is our Father in an invisible way, so is His Church, and the fatherly nature of the Church is evidenced in the visible head of the Church on earth, the holy Roman Pontiff. As the Father of all men, Pope John XXIII has shown his concern for the one aspect of our lives which is of ultimate importance: saving our souls. His constant attention is to the needs of his sons, his whole life and being are given for their benefit. His calling the Second Vatican Council is a striking instance of his concern for sons who need his prudent direction. The strong father must lead his family through the crises of life. The Pope's concern for his people is a sign of God's concern for His creatures. Pope John has called for an assembly of the rulers of the Church to re-evaluate the Church's role in revolutionary social upheavals and in the age of nuclear war threats and interplanetary exploration. The Church wants to re-examine the continuation of its life which traces back to the Crucifixion and descent of the Holy Spirit. The Pope urges us to renew our fervor not only by looking to our past, but also by accepting new and abundant graces. Yet, to think of the Church's role only as responding to the demands of a changing world is a mistake. The Church also develops through its own interior life, and by this increase keeps pace with the movements and evolution of men and history.

The very words of Pope John spoken in the Consistorial Hall of the Vatican Palace tells us what he expects of the Council: "To put it briefly but completely, the Council intends to re-vest the clergy with a new brilliance of sanctity. It intends that the people be instructed efficaciously in the truths of the Faith of morals; that new generations arising as a hope of better times be educated properly; that care be given to the social apostolate; that Christians have a missionary heart." On another occasion, he stated that the aim of the Council is "to pause a little in a loving study of the Church and try to rediscover the lines of her more fervent youth and to reconstruct them in a way that will reveal their power over modern

minds that are tempted and deceived by the false theories of the prince of this world, the open or hidden adversary of the Son of God, Redeemer and Savior."

When our spiritual father speaks to us, we have an obligation to honor, imitate and obey him, just as we have in relation to our heavenly Father. Consequently, it is for us to listen and, according to our capability, to respond to the Pope's direction.

It is a mistake to think of the Council only as a gathering of clerics, and to conclude that its deliberations will have effect only in the small circle of the Church hierarchy. The Pope has stressed the role of the Council in restoring Christian life throughout the Church. We should be conscious of our individual responsibility for its success, and we should look forward to the good effects expected from the doctrinal clarification and disciplinary reforms which the Council will promulgate.

Pope John has emphasized the need of the inner conversion of all of us. We must recognize our own sinfulness. We must apply the uncomfortable parts of the gospel teaching to ourselves. But the difficulty here is not in the application; rather it is in the possibility of self-deception. Our false security only blinds us to our need for reforming our daily lives. Every Catholic must mend the tattered spiritual garment he wears in the company of his neighbor. Implied in every measure of reform or restoration which the Council will initiate is the dominating purpose of transforming men's souls through grace. This interior conversion, within the souls of individual Christians, must be the beginning of the world-wide restoration in Christ towards which the efforts of the Council will be directed.

We must all pray for the success of the Council. Yet all our tremendous activity, all the sacrifices, all the prayers we offer for the Council are not what brings about its fruit. It is the Spirit of God in utter and absolute freedom which gives us every gift. From the Council's very beginning, as in every human effort, only divine grace prompts every initiative. The Pope himself has told us: "We have felt that it was God's lofty command that caused the thought of celebrating an Ecumenical Council to rise. . . ."

The Second Vatican Council manifests to us, then, a whole galaxy of divine love. It exemplifies God's fatherly character, the relation of the Son (and through Him, of His Church) to the Father, and the Love of them both, the Holy Spirit. The Council is the manifestation of God's life in us, and our life in God, the life of divine grace given by the eternally abiding God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.