

God's Desire to Love You (It's Not Something You Have to Earn)

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Hello, I'm Katie Hartfiel and I am excited to pray with you all and to be talking today about God the Father. So, let's start!

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Oh Lord, we thank You for the honor that we do not deserve of being Your children. And yet You love us. That You have a Father's heart that is reckless in Your adoration, in Your sacrifice, in Your goodness of how You love us. And we pray during this time of Advent for a greater recognition and greater gratitude for Your love, for Your Fatherhood. And we ask that our blessed mother who trusted in You and who found her identity in her love, that she experienced from You, that she will pray with us and for us. Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A Difficult Time

So, today we are talking about God the Father. And if I'm perfectly honest and transparent, this is a really hard topic for me. I shared a little bit about how my dad left when I was in high school and we had a very tense relationship. And really growing up, it's not like our relationship was ever fantastic. We had a lot of fights. He wasn't really around very much. He worked evenings, and so, I would see him just when he took me to school in the morning growing up. He worked Saturdays, and so we didn't have, you know, this deep connection in any way. And obviously, when he left, that was a really, really big blow.

And I struggled a lot as an adult trying to figure out what the right role was and what the right communication was and things like that. We would talk a couple times a year and not necessarily for very long. He would come and visit maybe once every three to five years or something like that. But it was really strained. It was really hard.

In 2020, I got a message one morning that he was in the hospital with COVID, and ended up over the next several days really declining and really struggling within that category, my brother and I both trying to process these things. He was living in a different state, so making sure that we could get the information that we needed. Eventually he was put into a medical coma as he was intubated, and he was there for nine days.

And over the course of those nine days, I was praying very specifically St. Joseph The Dreamer. Asleep, a father, praying for my dad and his conversion, that God would be working in that time. And on the ninth day we got word that he had passed away. And of course, all of the 2020 things that were so complicated with traveling and funeral arrangements and all this kind of, and all of these kinds of things, we ended up not even being able to go to his funeral, which was out of state. And we instead decided, my husband and I,

that we were going to go to the beach for the weekend and just be really intentional about praying for him. And started that off with an appointment with a friend of ours, Father Jude, for confession.

So, something that I was really, really struggling with during that time that I had thought about a lot over the years was, was I a good daughter? Like, I know that my dad was actually not a good father in a lot of ways. He had his moments, but was I a good daughter? And especially all of a sudden here in this moment, the question that I asked myself so many times, "As a Christian, is there more that I'm supposed to be doing?" If I would've said this, if I would've made this in invitation, if I would've explained this thing, if I would've explained it a certain way, if I would've reached out more, was I supposed to do this? Was God asking me to do this and I wasn't? And all of a sudden, now it's too late.

So, I brought this into confession, and I was obviously a wreck and I am explaining all of this and crying and weeping. And amazingly at this time also, this was the year of St. Joseph. And the Holy Father had indicated that it was a year dedicated to St. Joseph, and there were certain pilgrimage sites that were set out around the world where you could go and make pilgrimage and pray for indulgence, and ask for the Lord, specifically as you're praying for an indulgence, asking that God will cleanse and will purify in order for yourself or offering for another person to be able to make it to heaven, right? And so, at this time, another priest friend of ours had offered to do memorial mass for my dad. Guess where?

An Unforgettable Confession

At St. Joseph's Parish here in Houston. And this was one of those pilgrimage sites. And so, I'm explaining this to this priest this day while I was in confession that I'm here because I'm trying to make a good confession. I'm trying to offer these prayers for my father through the intercession of St. Joseph and all of these things. And yet I feel like I dropped the ball and I screwed up. And what if, you know, what if I was supposed to do all of these things, and if it's a sin of omission, then Lord I am so sorry. And I was wrecked and I was crying. And the priest, he was so incredible, but so stern as a father should be.

And he took his hand and he placed it on his desk with authority, and he said, "Katie, I'm going to say a bunch of things to you today that you already know but that you need to hear." And he said, "You are here because you want your dad in heaven. And all of these other things, it doesn't matter anymore. It's too late. Your dad is gone. So, all of the, should I have done this? Could I have done this? Was I supposed to do this? It does not matter. It's over. But what you are showing me as you're sitting here today is that you want your father in heaven and that matters. And your prayers for him now matter. And the way that you sacrifice for him and the way that you love him now, it matters."

And he said, you know, "I look at the story of Jesus after He has died and after He has resurrected. And here are all of these apostles who abandoned Him. And they're sitting in this room, right? And can you imagine the guilt that you're feeling right now and the questions that you're asking right now, can you imagine how they felt that they're there and they're in despair because they left Jesus to die alone?" And he said, "Jesus comes and what does He do? He walks through the wall. He walks through that wall. And does He come in and does He look at all of them and say, "Where were you guys? What are you doing? This is not the

plan. Like, this is not what I would've hoped for." All of these things, does He tell them everything that they did wrong? Or what does He say?" And of course, I'm like, I can barely even talk. And he's like, "What did He say, Katie? What did He say?" Peace be with you. Peace be with you. And he said, "The Lord wants to walk the walls of your heart in your pain and in your suffering and in your desires. And he wants to say peace. Peace be with you. Peace be with you."

And my friends, our God is a good Father. That He is a good Father. And I don't know what kind of father you had or what kind of areas of your own life, maybe in your own fatherhood or in your own motherhood, maybe in these areas of your own life where you say, "Was I a good son? Was I a good daughter?" These areas of regret and these areas of pain and suffering. But God is saying peace to be with you, that this is what a good father does. And He used this good father, this priest, to pour out that love and that goodness on me in this moment. That this is the father that we have. That is who we are and of what we done that He comes to say, "Peace be with you." And I think sometimes for all of us, there can be these areas of our life where we want to have this image of a good father, but we're not comfortable with it maybe because of our wounds, but also because we are more comfortable with earning love than receiving it in a way that is not merited. That we would rather come to the Lord and we would rather show Him all of the things that we have done and the things that we have done well, and to feel like we are deserving of His love.

But there is a big difference between earning and being loved. And for us as humans, we learn how to earn at a very young age. We even as babies learn how to gain attention or reactions. Not that this is a bad thing in any way, but if I do this thing and then everybody laughs, or everybody smiles, and then the baby does it over and over and over again to get that same reaction, right? To earn that kind of attention. We learn as we grow older how to earn affirmation from other people. We earn our grades. We work hard. Again, not a bad thing. We earn playing time in sports. We work really hard and we practice in order to be the best. We learn how to earn attention from the opposite sex or from other friends. And then, of course, we learn how to earn as employees. We learn how to earn within our jobs and within our careers trying to advance these areas of our life. And we've become really comfortable with working hard, which again, virtue and is a good thing, but sometimes we become more comfortable with earning than we are with receiving.

For a lot of us and I would tell you very honestly that this is an area within my own life that I really struggle. That I'm more comfortable with earning than I am with receiving. That for many of us, we are more comfortable being slaves or at least more comfortable being employees than we are with just receiving God's love in a way that we have not earned. Yet this is what God sent His Son for. Not for us to earn and to prove ourselves to God as Father, but for us to find our identity in who God is. Look to the scriptures at a familiar story.

Luke 4

This is from Luke 4 of the Son of the Father. And this is the story of Jesus being called out into the temptation in the desert. And it says, "Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days to be tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days. And when they were over He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' And

Jesus answered him. "It is written, one does not live by bread alone." And when we look at this part of the story, I want to ask you, what was the first temptation that Jesus experienced in the desert? What was the first temptation in this story? And you might say, "Well, that's very obvious. It is to turn the stone into bread."

And yet the story says if. If you are the Son of God. If you are the Son of God. Now the first temptation actually that Jesus experiences is a question of His identity as Son, which is an attack on God's identity as Father. It's an attack on the fatherhood of God. If you are the Son of God, then are you? Are you God's son? Are you God's daughter? Are you one who finds everything about yourself, the core of who you are based in who you are in Him and in His fatherhood? You see, if we look back, this is from Luke 4, but if we look to Luke 3, the story that comes right before this, and of course, you know when Luke was writing this, he wasn't writing, like, verse this, verse that chapter. It was one continuous story, right?

And so, if we look at what happens right before this, what we find is the baptism of Jesus. And it says, "After all the people had been baptized and Jesus had also been baptized and He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove and a voice from heaven said, 'You are my beloved Son. And with You, I am well pleased.'" This is what the Lord speaks to you this day.

We Are His Children

You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. And the devil is going to attack that. And that attack is personal. And yes, it's personal to you, but that attack is even more personal because it's an attack on God the Father. Your identity as belonging to God is the second most important thought that you will ever have in your life, who you are, and the first is who God is. And it's going to change everything about your pursuit of holiness. And this is why the devil loves to center his attention so much on this question. Are you? If you are a son or a daughter? Because he knows that if he can hit that foundation, that he can crumble everything else like a house of cards. "You are mine," is what the Lord speaks.

He says over and over in the scriptures, it says in Ephesians 1:4-6, "Before the foundation of the world, He destined us in love to be His sons." 2 Corinthians 6:18, "'I will be a father to you and you shall be My sons and My daughters,' says the Lord Almighty." Galatians 4:6, "As proof that you are His children, God sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying out, 'Abba Father.'" Galatians 4:7, "So, you are no longer a slave but a child. And if a child, then also an heir through God." 1 John 3:2. "Beloved, we are God's children now. What we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do not know when it will be revealed, that we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is." And Romans 8:14, "Do not fall back on a spirit of fear but be received in a spirit of adoption. So, to cry out of, 'Abba Father.'"

That very specific qualifier there, the spirit of adoption always really confused me. And there's several other areas where we hear this, that we are adopted sons and daughters of the Lord. And I learned a few years ago that at the time that St. Paul was writing about this adoption, that the law actually in Roman times was that if you had a child and if for any reason you didn't like that child, if they were annoying to you, if maybe they had a disability, if there was something that they did that was unacceptable, that actually by law you could under any circumstances, leave that child on the side of the road and abandon them with no

consequence whatsoever. It was the law. It was allowed. And this was because they believed you didn't ask for that child. So, it wasn't your fault. And so, you could leave them. However, if you chose to adopt someone, they actually became a new person. Now, that person that you adopted at any point in their life, if they had a warrant out for their arrest, then it was no longer valid because that person who had that charge against them didn't exist anymore. If they had debts that they owed, they didn't have to pay them because that person was gone. That this was a new person taking on a new identity. And if you chose to adopt someone, you knew exactly what you were getting. And under no circumstances, anytime, any way, for any reason could you ever, ever, ever leave them.

Our God knows what He's getting. God our Father knows more about you than you do yourself. And you don't have to earn it. You don't have to do anything in order to talk God into loving you. But in order to truly be able to assume your identity as a beloved son, as a beloved daughter, you have to be able to receive. To let God say, "Peace. It's you. It's you that I am here for." And you see, in an Advent, in a particular way, God wants to reveal this. Who you are in Him. And the gift that He desires to give and the love of His Son, and the gift of eternal salvation, so you can be together forever.

Closing Prayer

Let's pray. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus, we open up any of these old wounds, these fears, these areas of regret, these areas where we hold tight to trying to prove our worthiness to be loved. We let it all go and we come before You as a child ready to be loved. And we are well aware of our sins and of our failures, of what a mess we are. And we know as they say that the devil knows your name, but he calls you by your sin. And God knows your sin, but He calls you by name. And He says, "You are mine." And Lord, we ask for a greater strengthening and a greater confirming of that within the hearts of all of those who are praying with us this day. And we ask once again for our blessed mother as a mother to pray for us, to know and be loved by the Father. Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.