

I and the Father are One

The Four Gospels each have their own unique depiction of the person of Jesus. Matthew, rooted in Aramaic and paying careful attention to the connection with the whole Jewish tradition, from the opening Genealogy in Chapter One onwards. Jesus is teacher par excellence. In Mark we have a condensed style with disciples and apostles slow to get it, even up to the resurrection and beyond. Luke's artful understanding of the world of physical healing sets him on a course of portraying Christ's mercy and forgiveness; while John portrays the **divinity** of Jesus from the Prologue onwards: In the beginning was the Word, as if to start the bible all over again under the power of God's new creativity through Jesus, Word made Flesh. It's about Jesus and His Father.

Today's Gospel drama furthers the developing confrontation between the status quo Jews, here tending to portray disbelievers, and Jesus who once more claims divinity in no uncertain terms: Before Abraham came to be I AM. The statement was not about proving a historical age difference between Abraham and Jesus as was immediately sought in rebuttal to the questions put to Jesus by the skeptics. Here Jesus was proclaiming He was above Abraham, indeed "before" everyone else. In time, space and existence. That was the **I AM** of Yahweh to Moses and Abraham. He would not compromise the Truth.

Yet Jesus remarkably tells us in this passage is that Divinity is not a display of power and grandeur. That He defers to His heavenly Father for He says: "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing. But it is my Father who glorifies me." And how is this done? Through miracles? Through splendid parables? Through beneficent beatitudes, teachings, healings? No, through constant recourse to the Father. It is significant that even the Divine Jesus – though he is man as well – does not throw around self-sufficiency as the guide to his

mission. The Glory – not his own - is not about his resurrection, ascension and even his privilege of judgment alluded to in other N T passages. John's focal point is Jesus fulfilling the Father's plan in obedience, marking the crossroads of both natures, perhaps the crossbeams would be better said: Calvary itself. His death on a bloodied, torture-laden cross.

The Gospel passage starts with talking about not seeing death and ends with people wanting to kill by throwing stones. - from promise of enduring life to violent rejection. One gives the other destroys. And why? Well, they weren't ready for this sort of Messiah. Come to think of it neither was Peter who protested Jesus' carefully timed announcement that in a short while he would be put to death.

No, Jesus would not be reduced to a wonderworker, a soothsayer, a crowd pleaser, and certainly not someone who would even come down from a cross and save himself to prove that brand of false redemption playing. That last temptation came upon Him through Satan who had earlier urged him to throw himself down from the temple ramparts and not disappoint others without flaunting his divine powers. Or so it was supposed to play out. How strong that final temptation must have been for the Crucified.

The drama of the Cross was not to be played around self-preservation. It was about His *word*, everything He *taught*, originally uttered from the Mouth of the Father as the Eternal Word, the expression of the Father. *And the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God..* And now with the irony sprinkled throughout John's Gospel we hear: "*Who do you make yourself out to be?*" The reader – you and I and the early Christians back then - might easily conclude from this taunting question, "Well, God, of course." But what would *you* have said *then?* It's a good question to spend some time on. Like "*Who do you say that I am?*" found elsewhere reminds us of our constant need to remind us of the gift of Christ as Word of the Father.

Jesus' intimate rooting of himself in the Father is crucial to the Gospel of John. That is that is always the moment when the Holy Spirit is recognized as well, in the Baptism, in the Transfiguration, and in the Priestly Prayer where He expansively declares that He and his Father are one. In fact that love relationship is so eternally intimate that It breathes forth the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus speaks of the Son and the Father he does so in terms that his countrymen would understand: *I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.* And: *the Father does not judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to his Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.* These two sentences in Chapter 5 of John show a mutual deference, a love that looks out for the other. This is straight forward language of respect, of love, and authority known in Jewish families and revered between a Jewish son and his Abba, Daddy.

In contrast today we are suffering from a growing fatherless society, rampant in lower economic ranks, but found throughout in increasing numbers. What Jesus is talking about here is the model of Divinity which is mysteriously planted in the generational understanding of Father-Son as human beings. These are mere reflections of the real thing, the Infinite Love of Jesus and the Father in heaven we don't see, the Divine Model of all fatherhood. God as Father is not missing from the earthly scene. He is reflected with perfection we are told in Jesus Christ. Colossians early hymn of the Christian community sang *"He is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation."* And "firstborn" as underscored in Psalm 89: *"I myself make him the first born. I will establish his dynasty forever."* This sounds like stories of kings and princes, but it's not so much out of our reach: The father went after the lost prodigal son with love and yearning. Today so many homes are fatherless, and so many fathers grieve over a lost son from the faith or even from natural kinship. What a far cry from the images both human and divine that Jesus painted in

describing the love of His Father for not only Jesus, His Son, but for all of us adopted sons and daughters. That explains why the GLORY of Jesus is in glorifying His Father – following his eternal plan for us. Our redemption through the Cross.

If you have loved ones who are away from the church our prayers consolidate with you and right now all listeners are asked to pray together around the world for the return of the prodigal sons and daughters to their fathers, to the faith, to Mass, the Sacraments. Let them know they are loved. And please join in this Mass to offer that prayer and through the rest of Lent, as Jesus unfolds the love of his Father, that fathers of families struggling for jobs, or otherwise abandoning families may return to them and who need them.

In particular the past abortion involving a father who has not only abandoned his son somehow, but who **specifically** played a role in the ***killing*** of his unborn child, can bring great grief in many fathers later on. They often suffer from displaced anger at others traceable to their own earlier selfish decision. He perhaps pushed the mother into the abortion because he didn't stand up in love for her and the budding life within her. For example a young man may rationalize: "I'm still in med school, advancing in my career, or in the ranks of a budding military career. This is a terrible time for us to have a child." The paternal instinct is ***shoved aside*** by the craving for career pursuit resulting in a gradually weakened sense of fatherly protection standing up for both the mother and the unborn within her. The chosen solution in the critical moment is fed by personal gain and not by love for the life of the child or the welfare of the mother – in the long run. But these are not measured with the love of a father for a son; but rather succumb to a career. The words of Jesus and his Father show us otherwise.

In some instances he knew nothing of the abortion of his child and was cheated of his fatherhood due to the unjust outplaying of our current law allow-ing for

such injustice. In all of this, mostly speaking of young unmarried mothers and fathers, it is admittedly hard to make a comparison with the high standard of Jesus for his Father pitted against the rather feeling that uproots a young man after finding out about a pregnancy which he caused, how one *reacts* or *responds* depends on the cultural acclamation he has: is he predis-posed to being a father? Is it a thrilling moment or a moment of revulsion? The question of whether he should have become a father is another factor, the result, quite often of actions out of wedlock, in an unchaste relationship. But even passing that serious point for a moment, what is the disposition to being a father, now that he is already one, whether he wants it or not? Young men ought to ponder that question, along with the gift and self-respect power of chastity.

Our secular culture has so acclimated the man easily to dispose of the unborn, that each caving in to the abortion decision lessens his paternal instinct, causes a rift in following his legitimate career plans and often makes life distasteful. Ironically that is the very thing he wanted to avoid by insisting on the abortion, the abandonment of the child in the womb. We know abortion destroys babies. Nobody who is honest can deny that. We know many programs that help mothers after their abortions, and this is so very helpful. But people are not as aware of the harm abortion involvement does to men, to his own fatherhood. It's not just about masculinity, it's about fatherhood.

But abortion-driven feminism has over time tarnished the sublime gift of motherhood. By doing so, it redefines the full liberation of the woman as including the right to kill her own unborn, legally and culturally. This radical change has played a large roll in deadening the *paternal* protection that is instinctive in a man, and the social man is pressured to abandon to: "whatever you want, love, is fine by me." Somehow this virile instinct is revered as military men and firefighters to *protect* others and even *rescue* them. But sadly not so here when it involves the defenseless child. We are reaping the debilitating effects of this on men as fathers, coupled with the ravages of families abandoned by fathers.

To be sure these characteristics of valor are eminent in women as well. Responsibility is put before rights. That is exactly what Jesus is saying in the relationship he models with his Beloved Father. And the gift of the Holy Spirit comes from that infinite love affair. And the Holy Spirit is the Divine Spouse of our Lady. We call Him the Giver of Life, and Mary the Mediator of all Graces. All are begun as it were eternally by the love between Father and Son. We need to help otherwise good men toss aside the lie that has created family indifferent fathers, and mistaken indifference for a virtue.

Of course it is not just about abortion, which tears at the fabric of this human reflection of Divine Fatherhood and Sonship. It is also in giving into the baser elements lacking self-control, run-away *pornography*, being huger than huge in this whole development. The internet was not around in the time of Caesar and Christ. Today ancient prostitution comes in easy, virtual doses, *on line* doses: a room in a safe place here, a dark basement there, all the while in sneaky servitude to sinful cheating on one's spouse for self-gratification.

How does such masculine dishonesty dare to sport itself against the backdrop of *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,"* or even *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?"*

Or if not blatant porn or even steadily creeping pornography with its millions of websites tentacles on line popping up to grab the unwary man - then what's all the endless hours at the office away from home all about, legitimate or otherwise? Where is the quality time between dad and son, between dad and mom for the son and daughter, or simply in a wholesome way even precious time between husband and wife? Some men in prison are relating their own grappling with these things earlier on, and they often regret their lack of real manhood in a virtuous decision and not just a macho sense.

Fatherhood demands first a manlike willingness to put aside self-gratification for the love and well-being of the one he claims he loves. Looking at the aftermath of abortion on men, when they look back it is their anger at themselves for not taking the instinct of fatherhood seriously and substituting some false chauvinist attitude that sounds like care and tolerance, but frankly is born of indifference and subtle self-interest, if not blatant refusal to allow new life to proceed.

On a larger societal misunderstanding of things this abandonment of the role of protector has led some men think they are standing up for women when they say: “as a man you have no business telling a woman” – actually they are mothers – “what to do with her body”... that is, kill her child. That’s as nonsensical as saying “We’re not Germans, so we no right to tell Nazis what to do.” This is an example of aggressive feminism expressed as in a tug of war, and here the man lies down dead. No fatherly sense of protecting both the mother nor the child. Just a social mantra. We all need to be alert in righting the wrong that snuffs out millions of lives each year: today’s mega-war against the unborn. So let’s bring back to our society not a tug between the sexes as is often projected but rather a reclaim of love –generated *responsibility* between mother and father, for father and child and mother and child. Fatherhood is the honored place of masculinity which naturally drives the urge to stand up and protect those “being unjustly brought to their death” (as in the book of proverbs). These victims are found not in the gulags and concentration camps of other lands and times, but in the abortion mills and killing centers strategically situated in our cities and near our college campuses.

Jesus eventually wills Himself into the hands of the Father: *not my will but yours be done*. Surely it remains beyond our human capacity to fathom the love of God the Father fully expressed in the death of His Son, except in our contemplating the sheer love both Father and Son have for us – to redeem us and then to save us if we cooperate with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

With Jesus we proclaim: “Our Father, your will be done, forgive us as we forgive others. *We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world* - for which we praise you, Father, now and forever. Amen!