

**W**ith so many books around these days, busy readers have the right to ask: What's so special about *this* one? To put it plainly, this book is written to change the way you think—about everything.

Sound ambitious? It is. But not unreasonable, since what is presented in these chapters has already done exactly that for every one of the authors.

I should know. Not only have I experienced a profound change of mind and heart (as well as ecclesiastical affiliation), but I've also witnessed a similar transformation in the lives of each and every one of the authors, all of whom I've had as students at some point over the last two decades.

More accurately, perhaps, we have all been students together. And we've had the privilege of studying under the world's greatest teacher, Jesus Christ, who faithfully transmitted His lessons to us through the infallible channels of Scripture and Tradition, as they are interpreted by our Holy Mother, the Roman Catholic Church. And so that is all you should expect to find here.

The following chapters are meant to show how the teachings

of Scripture and the Catholic Church relate to each other. At the same time, we hope that you will catch a new vision of the Catholic faith in all of its beauty, symmetry, coherence, and practicality.

So instead of another novel fad, or some new esoteric theory knowable only by an elite and privileged few, these authors wish to share a vision that is “ever ancient and ever new.” After all, why settle for the fleeting when you can have the timeless and eternal?

What is this new-old vision? It is the mystery of the Family of God. Sounds simple enough. And in a way, it is—at first. But as you begin reading and thinking more about it, you’ll ascend from one level of mystery (the family as “the domestic Church,” *ecclesia domestica*) to another (the Church as “the Family of God,” *familia Dei*), until you reach the highest and holiest mystery of all: the Blessed Trinity, the divine Family.<sup>1</sup>

## Where to Begin—At the Sign of the Cross

How in the world can the average person be expected to attain such lofty heights? Perhaps the best way to begin is to recall something that every Catholic first learned as a child: how to make the Sign of the Cross. We perform this simple act of worship by acknowledging God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while tracing the lines of a cross over our body with our right hand.

There you have it, the entire Gospel summed up in about three seconds. We profess the highest and holiest mystery about God, the Blessed Trinity, while confessing what Jesus Christ did on Calvary for our salvation.

We do it whenever we enter a Church, and at the beginning

<sup>1</sup> See Francis Cardinal George, *Inculturation and Ecclesial Communion* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1990), 262: “Communio, the Church’s internal sharing, is rooted in the life of the Trinity and is structured or expressed externally in a diversity of roles in the Church. Another analogue for Church life, the natural hierarchy of the family, provides a model for understanding ecclesial hierarchy.” He adds: “The internal dynamics of family, the natural complementarity of its different members, the exchange of services, of education, of the fruits of the personal sacrifice—all enable John Paul II to see the family as a domestic Church and the Church herself as the family of God.”

and end of every Mass. Some major leaguers do it every time they step into the batter's box. For most of us, however, we first experienced it not as something we did, but as something done to us—as babies—by our natural parents, godparents, and the priest, who fulfilled the role of our spiritual father, on the occasion of our Baptism.

At that moment, we were born from above and made to share in the grace of God's own family life, as His beloved children. This is the very thing that we call to mind every time we make the Sign of the Cross, namely, our adoption as God's children and entrance into the divine family of Christ, the Church. It is our identity.

It seems simple enough, at one level. And yet it remains an inexhaustible mystery for the greatest saints and highest angels. In the final analysis, all of theology is reducible to a sustained effort by theologians to unpack the vast sum of truth signified by this one simple act. In any case, it's more than mere ritual.

## The Greatest Mystery of Faith— The Trinity as the First Family

For many Christians, the Trinity is simply a dogma that you must accept—if only to avoid heresy. Beyond that, however, many don't give it much thought. After all, they say, it *is* a mystery. And so it is, and more: It is the chief mystery of our faith, from which every other mystery flows.<sup>2</sup>

But what do we mean by mystery? One common misunderstanding is echoed in the definition once offered by a boy in Sunday school: "A mystery," he announced to the class, "is something that we have to believe, even if we know it isn't true."

Not quite. Further, the notion of mystery is not the same thing as a secret or a puzzle. Certainly supernatural myster-

<sup>2</sup> See J. A. DiNoia, O.P., et al., *The Love That Never Ends: A Key to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 25: "All of the great mysteries of the Christian faith—creation, revelation, incarnation, redemption, communion, the Church, our Lady, and the last things—unfold in the Catechism as elements of the single mystery of the divine Trinity."

ies are not knowable by our natural human powers alone. Yet mysteries do not go against our reason and experience, simply beyond them.

In this way, the mysteries of faith are to the mind what light is to the eyes: They make our spiritual vision possible. Moreover, there are *natural* mysteries (e.g., time, space, life, love), just as there are *supernatural* mysteries (e.g., Trinity, Incarnation, inspiration, transubstantiation). Natural mysteries are like the sun, which enables us to see during the day, while the supernatural mysteries of faith are like the stars, which enable us to see at night. If you think this makes faith inferior, recall that, although we do not see as well at night, we nevertheless can see much farther—into the very depths of outer space.

Both sets of mysteries extend beyond the reach of our real—but meager—powers of logical proof and scientific demonstration. However, that doesn't require us to deny the truth and reality of either set. Recall how the axioms of geometry work; even though they are impossible to prove, they serve as the necessary means to build “proofs” of theorems and corollaries. Indeed, there would be no geometry without axioms. Likewise, there would be no philosophy or science without natural mysteries; just as faith could not exist without supernatural mysteries.

Supernatural mysteries of faith may be understood as divinely revealed truths that we believe on the authority of God Our Father. Our faith ultimately rests on God's fatherly goodness, wisdom, and power. This fact underscores the importance of the mystery of the Trinity; for without it, we would not know that God is Father.<sup>3</sup>

We can also see why the Trinity is the highest mystery, for it points beyond all other revealed truths, which only tell us what God has done (e.g., creation, redemption, sanctification). In fact,

<sup>3</sup> The Church's ancient formulation of the Trinitarian dogma was based upon the conviction, drawn from the New Testament, that God's eternal Fatherhood is more than a metaphorical image—it is a metaphysical reality. God's eternal sonship necessarily follows, as Saint Athanasius effectively demonstrated against the Arians in the fourth century. Since the Son is the eternal image (*eikon*) of the Father—not in a static but truly

only the dogma of the Trinity discloses the all-surpassing mystery of God's essential identity, that is, who He is—in Himself, from all eternity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Perhaps nobody has stated this awesome mystery more simply and clearly and profoundly than Pope John Paul II: "God in His deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since He has in Himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love."<sup>4</sup> Did you catch that? Notice he did not say that God is *like* a family, but that He *is* a family. Why? Because God possesses—from eternity—the essential attributes of family: fatherhood, sonship, and love. And He alone possesses them in their perfection.

It may be more accurate, then, to say that the Hahns are like a family, since these family attributes are present in my household, but only imperfectly. The Trinity is thus much more than a dogma to be memorized. It provides us a spiritual vision, as well as a practical challenge for families and parishes to live and love more like God.

dynamic sense—He must be eternally "imaging" the Father's life-giving act of eternal begetting. This points to the twofold reason for adding the *filioque* ("and the Son") clause to the Nicene Creed: First, because the Son would not image the Father if the Father "spirated" the Spirit apart from the Son; and second, because the Spirit's procession from the first two Persons represents the precise form in which the Son's eternal imaging of the Father is expressed. In other words, the Father's eternal act of "begetting" consists of a gift of life and love, which the Son must eternally image. Thus, the Holy Spirit is properly identified with that divine *Gift-of-Life-and-Love* (as Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas demonstrated). Long after the Council of Nicaea (325), in order to combat a variation of Arianism that emerged in seventh-century Spain, orthodox Catholic theologians recognized the need to add the *filioque* clause to the Creed of Nicaea. Their decision was subsequently ratified by several popes. Since the *filioque* clause ensures an understanding of the Son's full divinity, it also reinforces the Son's full equality with the Father. In this way, the *filioque* clause also points to the perfection of God's Fatherhood—as the theological conclusion needed to ensure the full perfection of the Father's eternal act of paternity. It is perhaps unfortunate that many contemporary ecumenical theologians tend to neglect these considerations (especially the last one).

<sup>4</sup> *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979), 86. Notably, the Pope goes on to say in the very next line: "This subject of the family is not, therefore, extraneous to the subject of the Holy Spirit."

## What Difference Does This Mystery Make?

At this point, someone might protest: Does this mean that all believers have to become professional theologians? Certainly not—any more than a man must become a master mechanic before he gets his driver’s license. But if true love leads a man to learn the ways of his beloved, then it should be considered normal for believers to desire to study and grow in the knowledge of God.

The fact of the matter is that theology is not the exclusive domain of professional theologians. Every true lover of God should have a strong desire to study theology—as a true “amateur” (French for “one who loves,” from the Latin *amor*). In short, theologizing means loving the Lord with all of our minds (cf. Mt. 22:37).<sup>5</sup>

What difference does all of this make for someone who truly wants to love God? It means that he’ll want to know who God really is, above all else, and not just what He has done. After all, how do you feel when another person relates to you, not for who you are as a person, but only for what you can do for them? Perhaps a bit used?

No real love or friendship is possible as long as the other person is unable or unwilling to look beyond your function, that is, to see you as a person. Likewise, it is vital to our spiritual maturity as God’s sons and daughters that we learn to look beyond what God has done, to see who He really is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Catechism, nos. 236-37).

<sup>5</sup> Many people wrongly assume that theologizing necessarily entails doubt, or some negative form of critical questioning. Perhaps that comes from the many theologians who have made a name for themselves by dissenting. In any case, the true nature of theology is stated by Saint Anselm: “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*). It is noteworthy that the Latin word for “seeking” (*quaerens*) is also the verbal root of *quaestio*, which represents a common theological form for medieval theologians like Saint Thomas Aquinas. Their understanding of “question” was more closely related to our notion of “quest” than to anything having to do with doubt *per se*. If we follow this classical sense, theology should be understood, quite literally, as a “faithful quest for understanding” (cf. Catechism, nos. 94, 158).

## What's in a Name?

The importance of getting this right really hit me one Sunday while attending Mass at a small parish in the Midwest. Standing up front, next to the priest, was the director of religious education, a middle-aged woman religious in a white robe. She began by making the Sign of the Cross, while intoning, “We gather together in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier.”

Now I had heard of this sort of thing happening before, but I had never actually seen it. It instantly struck me as wrong, quite apart from liturgical norms, feminist motives, or political agendas. But I wasn't sure exactly why—until three ideas suddenly converged in my mind. First, we were no longer naming God in terms of who He is—in Himself, from eternity; rather we were addressing Him simply in terms of what He has done—for us, in history. Second, although there's nothing wrong with acknowledging God's works (of creation, redemption, and sanctification), nonetheless, the act of *thanksgiving* is a lesser expression of worship than *praise*—which we offer God precisely for who He is. Third, no matter how old creation may be, it's definitely not eternal, in which case God cannot be an eternal Creator (let alone an eternal Redeemer or Sanctifier).

It follows that the Trinity is God's eternal identity. This implies that God's most proper name is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Anything else will invariably lead us to a shallower understanding of—and relationship with—our God and Savior.

Perhaps this strikes you as theological nit-picking. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Trinity is not only the most proper name for God, it also reveals to us the deepest dimensions of all God does, whether it be creating, redeeming, or sanctifying. For whatever God does, it flows freely from who He is. We may thus discern—with the eyes of faith—a familial purpose in all of God's words and deeds. In short, the world bears a certain Trinitarian trademark, what older theologians called “the footprints of the Trinity” (*vestigia Trinitatis*).

## Applying the Paradigm

Let us consider four doctrinal areas in order to see how this Trinitarian familial perspective may enhance our understanding:<sup>6</sup>

**1. Creator and Creation:** Seeing creation as the work of the Trinity enables us to see the world differently. God is more than our Creator; He is Our Father by grace. Instead of mere creatures, we are made in God's image and likeness to live as His sons and daughters. Instead of a vast impersonal cosmos, the Father fashioned the world to be our home—a royal palace and a holy temple.

**2. Covenant and Law:** More than a legal contract, a covenant is a sacred family bond. So God's covenants in salvation history (with Adam, Noah, Abram, Moses, David, and Jesus) reveal how He fathers His ever-expanding family and maintains its unity and solidarity. Accordingly, the laws of the covenant are not arbitrary stipulations forcefully imposed by a superior power, but rather expressions of God's fatherly wisdom, goodness, and love. We obey them in order to mature, so that we can love like God.

When God makes and keeps covenants with His people, He's just being true to Himself—for the Trinity is a covenantal Being.

"Covenant" is *what* God does because "covenant" is *who* God is.

**3. Sin and Judgment:** More than broken laws, sin means broken lives and broken homes. At root, sin comes from our refusal to keep the covenant, so we lose the grace of divine sonship. We sin because we don't want to love as much as God loves us; it's too demanding. Sin is absurd and deadly—for in sinning, we stupidly prefer something other than the life and love to which Our Father calls us. God punishes sin with death because sin is what kills His life in us. Judgment is not an impersonal legal process, nor are the covenant curses enactments of God's vindictive

<sup>6</sup> For a much fuller explanation and list of references, see Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Study of Covenant Types and Texts in the Old and New Testaments* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1995)

wrath. Like God's covenant law, the curses are not expressions of hatred, but fatherly love and discipline; they impose suffering that is remedial, restorative, and redemptive. God's wrath is not opposed to His love; it's an expression of it. God *is* love (1 Jn. 4:8), but His love is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). That fiery love reflects the inner life of the Trinity. Sinners don't escape God's love; they get burned by it—unless and until they reopen themselves to it. That is what repentance achieves, and that's what God's wrath is for. Seeing God as Father doesn't lessen the severity of His wrath, nor is a lower standard of justice implied. On the contrary, a good father requires more from his sons and daughters than judges from defendants. And a good father also shows greater mercy.

**4. Salvation and the Church:** Salvation is not only *from* sin, but *for* sonship—in Christ. We are not only forgiven by God's grace, we are adopted and divinized, that is, we “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). This is ultimately why God created us, to share in the life-giving love of the Trinity. Self-sacrificial love is the essential law of God's covenant, which we broke—but Jesus kept. After assuming our humanity, He transformed it into a perfect image—and instrument—of the Trinity's love, by offering it as a sacrificial gift-of-self to the Father on our behalf. The Son of God “took the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:6) so that sinful servants may be restored as sons of God. As Saint Athanasius declared: “The Son of God became the Son of Man so that sons of men could become sons of God.”

By establishing the New Covenant, Christ founded one Church—through His own resurrected body—as an extension of His Incarnation and the Trinity's life. The Catholic Church is the universal Family of God, outside of which there is no salvation. This teaching does not condemn anyone. Rather, it simply clarifies the essential meaning of salvation and the Church. Since the essence of salvation is the life of divine sonship, to speak of salvation outside of God's family, the Church, is to confuse things greatly—since being *outside* God's family is precisely what we need to be saved from (see Catechism, nos. 845-48).

I don't know about you, dear reader, but speaking personally, I find this familial approach to theological matters to be more than a little helpful. Having spent many years looking into various philosophical and systematic approaches, I am convinced of one thing: This is a theology that you can take home with you—and one that you'll find when you get there!

I'm also convinced that this "Family of God theology" hasn't come a moment too soon. Look around. Who can miss the signs of the deep crisis facing the institution of marriage and the family? Make no mistake about it, these are not normal times in which we're living. More than ever, the family is being besieged from without, and betrayed from within. And not only the nuclear family, but the Family of God, the Catholic Church.

War, violence, crime, abortion, addiction, perversion, deceit, ignorance, greed, disease. The oddest thing is that nobody really desires these things: But that is to miss the point, for what we *do* desire is what makes these things inevitable.

Fifty years ago, who would have imagined such troubled times? In fact, at least one man did—the pope. Listen to the prophetic voice of the Vicar of Christ, Pope Pius XII, writing to President Harry S Truman in 1949:

Salvation will not come to the world unless humanity, following the teachings and the example of Christ, comes to recognize that all men are children of the one Father who is in heaven, called to be true brethren through His divine Son whom He sent as the Redeemer of all.<sup>7</sup>

Since then, the same clarion call has never stopped resounding from the chair of Saint Peter. In fact, this great vision of the mystery of the Family of God has been consistently proclaimed and published by each and every pope, along with the writings of Vatican II, and perhaps most profoundly by Pope John Paul II, as Fr. Pablo Gadenz's chapter entitled "The Church as the Family of God" makes abundantly clear. To be sure, Our Heavenly Father

<sup>7</sup> From the Letter of Pope Pius XII to President Harry S Truman, published December 20, 1949.

can always be trusted to provide what His children need most.

## Heaven as Homecoming

When people say “heaven,” what comes to mind? White-robed saints, glorious angels, shining clouds, celestial choirs, gold harps? All of these are fine, but there’s much more to it.

Without going into great detail, there is one dominant theme that unites the many images found in Scripture and Christian art: Heaven is one glorious family reunion of all God’s children.

Indeed, Jesus is the one who taught us to see heaven this way: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father” (Jn. 20:17). So he tells us:

In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (Jn. 14:2-3).

Saint Paul uses similar family language:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:22-23).

For Saint Paul, this puts our earthly life in perspective, for we are pilgrims heading home to heaven: “[O]ur commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

If heaven is our homeland, then death must lead to a true homecoming: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Saint Paul describes this “gain” in family terms, as our filial inheritance (cf. Rom. 8:9-17; Eph. 1:3-18).

A similar family outlook is reflected in the Epistle to the

## Hebrews:

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:10-11).

In closing, the author reminds his readers of their heavenly call:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and *to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven* (Heb. 12:22-23).

These family images of heaven converge in John's spectacular visions in the Book of Revelation. The heavenly Jerusalem is where all of the elect saints and angels gather as one glorious company of royal priests to worship before the throne of the Lamb (Rev. 4-5). We are united as brothers and sisters in Christ. At the climax of these prophetic visions, John is shown our eternal communion with Christ, which he describes in the most remarkably intimate terms, as "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). As the bride of Christ, the Church will be revealed in all her bridal beauty and splendor, which is nothing less than the eternal glory of the blessed Trinity (cf. Rev. 21:1-10, 22-23).

This nuptial bond between Christ and His Church reveals the profound symbolism of the Sacrament of Marriage. In fact, for Saint Paul the marriage between Christ and the Church is more than symbolism; it is the everlasting reality of marital love, of which our earthly marriages are but dim and temporary shadows (cf. Eph. 5:21-32). That is the same way Saint Paul sees God's fatherhood—as the eternal reality and perfect archetype that far surpasses human fatherhood (cf. Eph. 3:14-15).

My hope is that this book will help you grasp the basic theory and biblical rationale behind this vision of the Family of God. But theory is one thing, and practice is another. For

if you're anything like me, you find it much easier to think and talk about being a child of God than to believe it from the heart—and live it. Nowhere is the struggle greater—or more vital to our spiritual well-being—than when it comes to the issue of personal assurance. In other words, how can we be fully assured that God loves us as His children?

## **Rock-Solid Grounds: The Assurance of Our Father's Love**

God's gift of children confers the dignity of fatherhood upon men. My heavenly Father has blessed me so far with five wonderful kids: Michael, Gabriel, Hannah, Jeremiah, and Joseph. I must say, words can't begin to express how much I love and delight in them.

God has also used my children to offer another gift to me—full assurance of His love. Why? Because I am absolutely certain of one thing: I am *not* greater than God. So I can't possibly love my kids more than He loves His.

It does me a lot of good to think about that, long and hard. It seems these days that we need all the help we can get. And there may be none greater than the deep, abiding awareness of our own status as God's beloved children. What confidence this grace brings, for it roots us in the eternal love of the only perfect Father.

I admit that I've doubted God's fatherly love for me at times. On occasion, I've had to ask: How do I know that I am God's child?

The Holy Spirit will then prompt me to ask a similar question: Well, how do my kids know that they're mine?

That's easy.

First, they live in my house. Second, they are called by my name. Third, they sit at my table. Fourth, they share my flesh and blood. Fifth, my bride is their mother. Sixth, we've always celebrated birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and vacations together. Seventh, they receive instruction and discipline from me. These

are rock-solid grounds to assure my children that they'll never have to wonder to whom they belong.

Has Our Heavenly Father given us any less?

Well, if you put it that way . . . that's exactly the way Our Father *has* put it. And we call it the Catholic Church.

**First**, we live in His house. As members of the Catholic Church, we live in the house which Christ promised to build—as a wise man does—upon the rock (cf. Mt. 16:17-19; 7:24-27). “Christ was faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in hope” (Heb. 3:6).

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-20).

**Second**, we are called by His name. In Baptism, we are marked for life in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:18-20). We “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Eph. 1:13-14). Our family unity is thus based upon

the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (Eph. 4:3-6).

**Third**, we sit at His table. We “partake of the table of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:21)—as God’s children—in the Eucharist, which Jesus instituted in the presence of His disciples “as they were at table eating” (Mk. 14:18).

**Fourth**, we share His flesh and blood. In Holy Communion, we come to share in Christ’s flesh and blood, according to His command:

Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (Jn. 6:53-56).

**Fifth**, His bride is our mother. The Church is Christ's bride, the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Eph. 5:21-32; Rev. 21:1-10, 22-23), and also our mother. "But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (Gal. 4:26). Even more, Jesus gave us His mother, the Virgin Mary, to be our mother:

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (Jn. 19:26-27).

**Sixth**, we celebrate as a family. We gather together as the children of God to celebrate, most especially in the Eucharistic banquet: "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival" (1 Cor. 5:7-8). For this reason, God calls us to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart" (Eph. 5:18-19). As Catholics, we celebrate different feast days to honor our Blessed Mother and our spiritual brothers and sisters, the saints—not only for their holy lives, but also their glorious deaths, which marked their own joyous homecoming.

**Seventh**, we receive instruction and discipline from Him. Our Heavenly Father even uses our labors and sufferings to instruct and discipline us.

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does

not discipline? . . . For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness (Heb. 12:5-7, 10).

Our Heavenly Father's omnipotent love is the most fundamental reason why the Roman Catholic Church exists. More than just using it to maintain unity of doctrine, morals, and worship, God empowers the Church as His family for the purpose of blessing His children and establishing the *communio* of His family—down through the ages and all around the world.

In sum, Our Heavenly Father has given to us rock-solid grounds for assurance, more than any earthly father has ever provided. And so we can exclaim: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn. 3:1). Not only can we know that we are God's children, but we can be confident that our omnipotent Father will get us home safely: "I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

### **Postscript: In Memory of My Earthly Father**

It was a sacred moment when my heavenly Father called me to surrender my earthly father. Words utterly fail to capture the mixture of sorrow and joy that I felt in giving up a father—in the hope of being reunited as brothers in heaven.

Standing at his hospital bedside, I gazed into the fading eyes of the man that God chose to give me life, to teach me baseball and so much else. Indeed, here was the person who first introduced me to the meaning and mystery of a father's love.

Only now he was teaching me the most difficult and ultimate lesson in life—how to suffer and die. For the first time in our life together, he asked me to pray with him and read to him from the Scriptures. God's abundant mercies were evident.

In the midst of his suffering, my father was also discovering death's deepest and most wonderful secret: the glorious conversion that can be wrought in the humbled souls of God's beloved

children through the paternal prescription of pain.

After hearing his final belabored breath, I shut his eyes and knelt beside the bed and worshipped. For the first time in my life, I had no other father but God.

Since that day six years ago, I've thought about heaven more than in all thirty-five years that I lived before my father died. I have never stopped praying for him—or longing for our heavenly reunion, as brothers in Christ. *Requiescat in pace.*

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