

# What is divine filiation?

Knowing that God loves us as a father loves his children and gives his life for them is the great mystery of divine filiation. As St. Josemaría used to say, we are bearers of "the only flame capable of setting fire to hearts." Answers to common questions about this gift of the Holy Spirit by which, through baptism, we are made participants in Jesus' life.

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## **What is divine filiation?**

Christian life is built on the reality that God loves us. This is the fundamental truth that shapes our entire existence. He loves us not only when we respond to his call but also when we fail to do so. When we distance ourselves from Him, God finds ways to reach out to us so that we might return to Him.

We call the awareness of God's love for us a sense of *divine filiation*: it's knowing that He loves us as a father

loves his children, ready to give his life for them. This conviction is rooted in the supernatural reality of the new relationship that God the Father establishes with us through grace, making us his children in his Son, Jesus Christ, by giving us the Holy Spirit as a gift.

This is a profound mystery. For this reason, it can be difficult for us to truly grasp this truth: we are indeed children of God. Christ won this immeasurable gift for us by his passion and death.

As mere human beings, it may seem bold to address God as Father, but Christ Himself taught us to relate to Him in this way. We do so every time we pray the Our Father. Jesus taught us this prayer, and through baptism, He made us partakers of his very life, the life of grace. Through baptism, we become adopted children of God.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains this in the following way: “The personal relation of the Son to the Father is something that man cannot conceive of nor the angelic powers even dimly see (cf. *Jn* 1:1): and yet, the Spirit of the Son grants a participation in that very relation to us who believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we are born of God (cf. 1 *Jn* 5:1)” (no. 2780).

We all have some concept of fatherhood, partly influenced by the relationship we have had with our own fathers. The image of fatherhood that we carry within us may be very positive, but sometimes it may also be lacking, simply because our relationship with our earthly father has been flawed. But God is the perfect Father; there is no deficiency or distortion in Him. He fully embodies the qualities of fatherhood in his infinite love, care for each person, and providence,

which arranges events in the best possible way. The sense of divine filiation can therefore heal any wound left in our hearts by an imperfect father-child relationship.

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- Divine filiation “implies a genuine programme of interior life, which needs to be channelled through your relationship of piety with God (...) which will enable you to develop the attitudes and manner of a good son” (*Friends of God*, no. 150).
- “Rest in divine filiation. God is a Father — your Father! — full of warmth and infinite love. Call him Father frequently and tell him, when you are alone, that you love him, that you love him very much!, and that you feel proud and strong because you

are his son” (*The Forge*, no. 331).

- “Cheerfulness is a necessary consequence of our divine filiation, of knowing that our Father God loves us with a love of predilection, that he welcomes us, helps us and forgives us. Remember this and never forget it: even if it should seem at times that everything is collapsing, *nothing* is collapsing at all, because God doesn’t lose battles”
- “That close intimacy you have with Christ means that you have a duty to bear fruit. And yours will be a fruit that will satisfy the hunger of men who come up to you in your work, in your day-to-day life, in your family environment...” (*The Forge*, no. 981).

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## Filiation as a gift

What we might call the “sense of divine filiation” is not theoretical, nor is it merely an abstract concept. “It is a divine gift, an immense grace of God aimed at guiding all our thoughts and desires, our feelings, and our actions. (...) But it is a gift that, like fire, needs to be stoked so that the Christian’s behavior is enlightened and warmed up by it” (Ernst Burkhardt and Javier López, Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaría, Vol. 2, Scepter, New York, 2020, pg. 10).

For St. Josemaría, divine filiation is a foundational truth for our lives. The founder of Opus Dei frequently recalled St. Paul’s words in his letter to the Romans, reminding us that we are not slaves but children, and that we do not act out of fear because we have received the spirit of adoption (cf. *Rom* 8:15, 27). And because we

are children, we are also heirs: our goal is to reach Heaven and share in divine life eternally. This consciousness can shape a way of relating to God. He has entrusted us with a mission that encompasses our entire life and He supports us all the time, guiding us as a father leads a child who does not yet know how to walk alone. For this reason, we fear nothing and no one, not even ourselves, our weaknesses, or our rebellions: God the Father knows them, accounts for them, and helps us move forward. We can always begin again.

Being children of God brings with it the desire and will to resemble Him. We have been created in his image and likeness, and we seek to allow the beauty of the Father be imprinted on our souls (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2784). The experience of divine filiation is also fulfilled when suffering and the cross

come into play. It is then that our identification with Christ takes place; He suffered and died for us in order to fulfill his Father's will.

St. Josemaría understood adoptive divine filiation in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation. Thanks to this divine reality, all noble tasks can be activities of a child of God, because all of them have been embraced by Christ.

Another attitude linked to filiation is the humility and trust that make us like children. Jesus Himself said that the Father reveals Himself to *the little ones* (cf. Mt 11:25; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2785).

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- “This divine filiation is the basis of the spirit of Opus Dei. All men are children of God. But a child can look upon his father in many ways. We must try to

be children who realize that the Lord, by loving us as his children, has taken us into his house, in the middle of the world, to be members of his family, so that what is his is ours, and what is ours is his, and to develop that familiarity and confidence which prompts us to ask him, like children, for the moon! A child of God treats the Lord as his Father. He is not obsequious and servile, he is not merely formal and well-mannered: he is completely sincere and trusting. Men do not scandalise God. He can put up with all our infidelities. Our Father in heaven pardons any offence when his child returns to him, when he repents and asks for pardon. The Lord is such a good Father that he anticipates our desire to be pardoned and comes forward to us, opening his arms laden with

grace” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 64).

- “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? No one. If we approach our heavenly Father in this way, we will have no grounds for fearing anyone or anything” (*Friends of God*, no. 95).
  - “We cannot say that there are things — good, noble or indifferent — which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and death” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 112).
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## Filiation and self-gift

The awareness of divine filiation, combined with trust in our Father God, compels us to dedicate ourselves to others and share this gift with all people, because we have found the purpose of our existence.

The desire to share God's grace with others is part of divine filiation. It leads us to become more fraternal towards others and to develop our capacity for self-gift, not relying solely on our own strength but on that which comes from knowing we are children of God. The sense of divine filiation makes us place all our trust in the loving care of our Father God. It moves us to share this reality with others, so that they too may live motivated by this trust. True apostolic spirit stems from the certainty that God's arm has not been shortened and that He is always by our side.

The trust that comes from divine filiation allows us to set high goals. St. Augustine expresses this beautifully: “What indeed could He deny to the prayer of his children, when He has already granted them the privilege of being his children?” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 2, 4, 16). In Psalm 2, God the Father speaks to Christ, saying: *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage* (v. 8). This trust in God applies to all situations in our life, great or small. The new condition that man attains through the grace of baptism will come to completion in the glory of Heaven, which is nothing other than “the fullness of divine filiation” (St. Josemaría, Letter, 2-II-1945, no. 8).

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- “*Iesus Christus, Deus homo*: Jesus Christ, God-man. This is one of ‘the mighty works of God,’ which we should reflect

upon and thank him for. He has come to bring ‘peace on earth to men of good Will,’ to all men who want to unite their wills to the holy will of God — not just the rich, not just the poor, but everyone: all the brethren. We are all brothers in Jesus, children of God, brothers of Christ. His Mother is our mother.

- “There is only one race in the world: the race of the children of God. We should all speak the same language, taught us by our Father in heaven — the language Jesus spoke with his Father. It is the language of heart and mind, which you are using now, in your prayer — the language of contemplation, used by men who are spiritual, because they realize they are children of God. This language is expressed in a thousand motions of our will, in the clear

insights of our minds, in the affections of our heart, in our commitment to lead a virtuous life, in goodness, happiness and peace” (Christ is Passing By, no. 13).

- “*“Frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma.* Brother helped by brother is a fortress.’ Think for a moment and make up your mind to live the fraternal spirit that I have always asked of you” (The Way, no. 460).
- “Therefore, I repeat to you today, with St John: ‘See how greatly the Father has loved us; that we should be counted as God's children, should be indeed his children.’ Children of God, brothers of the Word made flesh, of him of whom it was said, ‘In him was life, and that life was the light of man.’ Children of the light, brothers of the light: that is what we are.

We bear the only flame capable of setting fire to hearts made of flesh” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 66).

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## **The gift of piety**

The gift of piety, one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, helps us relate to God as a Father and to establish this filial relationship in a habitual way. Specifically, the gift of piety “disposes the soul to be docile to the impulse the Holy Spirit gives to deal with God the Father in a filial way” (*Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaría*, Vol. 2, pg. 92). St. Paul tells us: *Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (Rom 8:14).*

We also find the basis for true freedom in divine filiation. A child does not act out of obligation but

from a desire to please his/her parents, trusting that what they ask is good for the child. Love, the true driving force of freedom, is expressed in the desire to live according to God's will, to integrate Christ's teachings into one's life, and to willingly receive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, divine filiation is also the foundation of our joy. One of the greatest sources of sadness for a person is loneliness. At times, we may feel alone in our work or within our family, but upon deeper reflection, in all those situations, we are profoundly accompanied by the Lord. Knowing that He is always with us is the greatest source of confidence, serenity, and joy.

How can we grow in this foundation of our spiritual life? We can ask for the grace to deepen our awareness as children of God, but we can also

actively cultivate our relationship with Him, anchor ourselves in Him, and trust Him even in the smallest matters. We need to have a bit of mistrust in ourselves, our own judgment, and our strength, so that the scales of God's will always weigh much more than our own.

Recognizing and valuing the divine aid we have received in our lives (and continue to receive every day) is key. God's help may come in small things, but those details reflect his fatherly affection for us.

Mary's motherhood is a participation in God's fatherhood: we have become children of God also thanks to her maternity. Jesus' '*Woman, behold your son*' (Jn 19:26) made us brothers of Christ and thus children in the Son. Practicing Marian filiation is an aspect of divine filiation: *You shall be nursed, you shall be carried on her hip, and you shall be bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother*

*comforts, so I will comfort you (Is 66:12-13).*

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- “The struggle of a child of God cannot go hand in hand with a spirit of sad-faced renunciation, sombre resignation or a lack of joy. It is, on the contrary, the struggle of the man in love who, whether working or resting, rejoicing or suffering, is always thinking of the one he loves, for whose sake he is happy to tackle any problems that may arise. Besides, in our case, being united with God, we can call ourselves victors because, I insist, he does not lose battles (*Friends of God*, no. 219).
- “Saint Luke the Evangelist tells us that Jesus prayed... What must his prayer have been like! Contemplate this fact slowly: the disciples had the

opportunity of talking to Jesus and in their conversations with him the Lord taught them by his words, and deeds, how they should pray. And he taught them this amazing truth of God's mercy: that we are God's children and that we can address Him as a child addresses his Father" (*The Forge*, no. 71).

- "A life of prayer and penance, together with an awareness of our divine filiation, transforms us into Christians whose piety is truly deep. We become little children at the feet of God. Piety is the virtue of children. And if the child is to take refuge in the arms of his father, he must be, and know that he is, small, needy. I have often meditated on this life of spiritual childhood, which is not incompatible with fortitude, because it demands a strong

will, proven maturity, an open and firm character” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 10).

- “Because Mary is our mother, devotion to her teaches us to be authentic sons: to love truly, without limit; to be simple, without the complications which come from selfishly thinking only about ourselves; to be happy, knowing that nothing can destroy our hope” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 143).

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## **Additional resources**

New Mediterraneans (1): "That First Prayer of a Child of God"

Embracing the World Through Prayer: Psalm 2

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