

The Creed Part III

“I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth.” In this statement, God is a person, not a thing, is revealed to us. God is extremely personal in that He chose to be called Father, by his most definitive revelation, Jesus; the Son of the Father, and the Incarnate Second Person of the Blessed Trinity—the son of Mary. Jesus used a word to talk to His Father: Abba, translates as “Papa”, with whom He was One. This is His name for Jesus, and for us. In the most personally generated utterances of Jesus to His Father, He uses the relational name Papa, or Abba. One may wonder why. Why would the Son of God do this? He is trying to tell us that God wants a personal relationship with each of us. Jesus teaches us that God’s for all the children of God, The Father’s name is Abba, or Papa.

Jesus’ use of Father means that Jesus wants us to know that the Father wants communion with us in a way that is similar to how Jesus has communion with the Father. If we are one with Jesus in Baptism, as St. Paul teaches in Romans chapter 6, then Jesus’ relationship with the Father is the same as our relationship with the Father. At the same time, we must balance this familiarity with the fact that Jesus recited the Psalms and other prayers as they were written in sacred scripture. It is also our tradition and the Jewish tradition that we use another name for the Father. It is a somewhat less relational word: God, Deus in Latin, Theos in Greek or, Adonai in Hebrew. Why did we change the name of Father or Abba to God, and why do we keep distancing ourselves from Abba? How important is it that we retain this tradition of using God instead of Father or Abba? To help us answer this question, let’s look at the scriptural record.

Judaism, which was Jesus’ religion, identified the people of Israel as God’s children. It also expressed the transcendence, holiness, and totally otherness of God from humans by using a title (Adonai) when speaking to the Father. This Hebrew word, which we translate as LORD, was used anytime the letters YHWH were expressed in the texts of the Pentateuch or prophets and other literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Rabbis and other leaders of the Jewish people did not want to lose the idea that God appeared to Moses as a frightening experience of a burning bush that defied understanding. God is Holy, God is OTHER. Lest we become to nonchalant, or familiar and lose respect and awe for Abba, we need to remind ourselves that God is not just a creature. He is the Creator and we are his creatures.

The dichotomous relationship of children going to Daddy when they are angry or happy and the ineffable, inexpressible, incomprehensible, HOLY GOD is hard to express in one word. Therefore, sometimes we say Father, and other times we say God, depending on the context of the prayer. This is somewhat similar to human relationships; sometimes we say our beloved’s name, other times nicknames or titles, depending on what we intend to do.