

# Love of the Father

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I find it difficult to talk about God as my father. This relationship is not easy to put into words, because God the Father isn't someone we see or touch, and yet I know deep down he is real. I've lived a relatively long life – a full one, blessed in many ways and marked by suffering too. I've had nine children, I've been a widow for twenty years, but I've come to rely ever more deeply on the Father, not in spite of painful experiences, but through them. So how do I relate to God as father? I think it's best described as trust, deep trust. I have learned over the years that I have no other option.

When I was a child, I thought of God as distant, but over time our relationship became more personal, as happened in relation to my own father. He was a good man, physically present to us children while leaving the loving and caring role to my mother. He worked hard but didn't engage emotionally with us. I remember a holiday as a teenager, where I was to travel on my own with him in the car. What would we talk about? All I can recall now is it wasn't as bad as I had imagined! I realised that my father loved me and knew me better than I thought. In his presence



this love was somehow transmitted to me, however uncomfortable I felt beforehand.

When he had a heart attack and woke up in the ICU, the first thing he said – and I was there – was 'Why did my father hate me?' My mother tried to reassure him that his father hadn't hated him, but was very strict, so that his son felt he wasn't accepted just as he was. It was sad that at nearly 90 he still had this feeling. I was with him while he was dying and could see he wasn't able to let go. No wonder, when he thought that he was going to a judgemental God. So I said to him, 'You did love your mother, and she loved you.' He replied, 'Oh yes, I loved my mother.' 'Well', I said, clutching at straws, 'in modern spirituality we believe that God is both male and female!' Amazingly he trusted me



and said, 'Is that so?' I could see his body soften, and soon afterwards he closed his eyes and died.

When I got the shocking news that my husband had died of a heart attack while cycling home from work, I didn't know how I could carry on. I turned to the Father, not always with beautiful words – instead often with tears, and with silence. But always with faith. I knew somehow that he was still holding me, still working for my good, even when I couldn't see how. Jesus promised, 'I am with you always' (Mt 28:20), and it was true. My husband used to recite Teresa of Ávila's prayer to my daughter when she was going through a stressful time. 'Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things; whoever has God lacks nothing; God

alone suffices.'

I subsequently wrote this on his gravestone, and it has been with me ever since. My husband's deep faith had helped me to handle the cross of his death.

I find God now in the kindness of others, in the silence of prayer, in the beauty of nature and in moments with my grandchildren. I experience God as a good father who walks alongside his child: he guides me, through Scripture or a good friend or in the gentle promptings of prayer – those moments when an idea or insight brings peace in love. Looking back, I see how the Father guided my important decisions: like moving house or getting into parish ministry. Even in what I thought were detours or painful chapters, I tried to trust in the Lord's presence and guidance.