

Abba

Abba means Father; but not just a word - a name spoken to somebody out-loud. The difference between Abba and Father: Abba was [and still is] a special name used by Hebrew-speaking families, a special name given by children to their father. In my family the equivalent was *Dad*.

Jesus Son of God: Jesus taught us to call God *Abba* [*Dad*]. For me to call God *Abba* would be using a foreign word - the name Jesus used; for him it means what *Dad* means for me. Jesus is asking me to call God *Dad!* Jesus dared to call God *Abba* and asks us to use the equivalent word for us.

Gospel: means Good News - and the Good News is I can call God *Dad!* This is Jesus' whole message. He *experienced* God as Abba - and prayed like that. This news is so good that it wiped away the sin of the world - past, present and to come, by one we call *Dad* [or whatever our family custom is]. God loves us not because we are good children, but because we are *his* children. Jesus is asking: *why did my parents love me; why do I love my children - unconditionally.* So sin is conquered no matter how much I disappoint God.

From the beginning of time we have searched for how to keep in the good books of the *Mystery of life*. Jesus solved this by saying *you do not have to try, only to trust.* God loves me because I'm me - no matter what mess I make of being me.

Spirit: Scripture speaks of us being *adopted* by the Spirit, so that we can *cry-out Abba* - Gal.4.6; Rom.8.15. *Hearing* the Good News is not immediately enough for us; it begins to be so when we get into the habit of calling God *Dad*. When we start behaving like Jesus. It is a gradual happening, like learning to swim. We have moments of insight along the way - as with acquiring a skill, there's always more to discover.

Jesus called the Spirit *he*; promising to send *him*. [presumably as the Word became flesh as male] as our *advocate*, because of our failures and omissions, the court of human approval demands to know what we have to say for ourselves - this is when the Spirit makes us cry-out *Abba*, which renders the court powerless to condemn us.

The Spirit is the Spirit of *Truth*. Not the truth of our sinfulness, but the truth of God's boundless forgiveness. The truth of God's parental love overrides all other truths. *God's justice is the same as God's mercy.* Which the prayer of the Church reminds us: *Lord, you reveal your mighty power through forgiveness and compassion* - Prayer of 26th week of the year.

Adoption: we already are God's children, by adoption. Jesus is the only one we call *God's only Son*. We can call God *Abba*, but it was Jesus who taught us. Nobody taught Jesus; calling God *Abba* came naturally to him. S Luke has twelve-year-old Jesus speaking of *my Father*. I am God's son by adoption, courtesy of Jesus, who is God's Son by courtesy of his Father.

The Spirit was always present in Jesus - whenever he was attacked, it was the Spirit who answered in him as one who prayed - *Abba*. Not a Spirit of adoption, but his own Spirit. He told us that when we are confronted *do not worry about what to say, the Spirit will speak out.* The Spirit in us courtesy of Jesus.

Crucifixion - was Jesus right? Nationalists saw God planning to overthrow the Roman occupation. So, how could Jesus refuse to be king - he, the promised one from God? Others believed the way to heaven was courtesy of the Law of Moses. How could Jesus be the Messiah by telling us to call God *Abba*? If that were true sinners would get away with being sinners, foreigners would be as

welcome as Israelites. The blind, the crippled and the lame as well as the lepers and the poor had as much right to call God *Abba* as the rich and the powerful.

Jesus got what he deserved by associating with such people. He died trusting *Abba*, and so can everybody else by calling God *Abba*. His enemies united, and put him on trial, sentenced him, and executed him - showing his followers that the *Good News* was fake news. That God favours those who prosper. Jesus had over-stepped the mark and paid the price.

Resurrection - yes, he was right: What they saw on Easter Day was what only God could show them. *But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him:* Acts.2.24. This was no ordinary seeing - Jesus, whom they had loved so much, was now present, beyond death. They realised that Jesus was right after all, about God, when he called God *Abba*. The Good News is true.

Pentecost: could well be the day when this fully dawned, the day they received the *know-how* to call God *Abba* - the Spirit.

Ascension: Joseph was a dreamer, son of Jacob; his father's favourite - which made his brothers jealous; and they sold him into slavery in Egypt. There he rose to become Pharaoh's right hand man; who said to the people: *if you want anything, go to Joseph* - Gen.41.55. The impact of the Resurrection was that God had put Jesus in the same position as Joseph. *If you want anything go to Jesus*. He has not simply gone away, but enter into the reality of the Christ - universally and permanently present.

Hope: the traditional symbol for hope is an anchor. I am like a boat, firmly attached to my anchor - at the right hand of God, tied to me in fraternity. Hope is connected with Ascension; those who saw him disappear from them are not dismayed - Jesus, remains with them as the Christ, universally present to all that is. Note the absence of any sense of nostalgia in Acts - no need for *if only...* they were aware of his presence within them. They know he is with *Abba*, our Father, and tied to us as a brother.

The Earliest Creed: *Jesus is the Christ, Son of God, the Lord...* If we believe this, we are saying he is the Messiah... the last Word, sent by God to say what he said. What he said was: *you can call God Abba, Father - you can trust as a child trusts a loving parent*. To believe that Jesus is the Christ - is to trust the Father - and we can call God *Abba*.

Baptism

Is the means by which we celebrate that we are children of God, by adoption. Everyone born is a child of God - those who believe-in and celebrate Baptism do so to welcome each new believer into the community. Jesus underwent Baptism - from JB; and Mark's Gospel says when Jesus came up out of the water:

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased
Mk.1.9-11.

In Baptism we too receive the Spirit of being God's child - each day that follows, God is saying to us: *you are my beloved*. Our ID is *beloved of Abba*, like no one else - this love is uniquely personal. God is not pleased with me because I am good, but because God is good. I now have my place at table - forever. If I turn

away and seek security elsewhere, my place is always assured; as long as I live, and beyond the grave. Which is why Baptism is never repeated.

Baptism celebrates something that is already true - otherwise there is no point in celebrating. The celebration makes Baptism tangible, in audible words, in a specific place that can be remembered and treasured, and honoured by living it every day; aware of being the *beloved of Abba*. Every gift has a giver, God is present in all his gifts, just as we are to another to whom we give presents. Creation is the way we experience all things, ourselves included, as gift here and now.

Original Sin: the name we give to the state of those who dare not call God *Abba*. Before the coming of Christ we carried the burden of trying to appease the hidden powers of the universe, without success. There seemed to be a key missing to the gates of heaven; we felt locked out.

Jesus taught us that the gates have never been shut. The Father's arms have always been wide open. But with fear present open doors are as shut as locked doors. Which is why Jesus says repeatedly, *do not be afraid*.

Once suspicion is present, it rapidly breeds itself: If I can't trust completely, I can't love completely. There seemed to be no exceptions to this - till Jesus arrived. But why call it *Original*? The story of Eden is not that things were once perfect, but is symbolic of us being ill at ease. We dream of being lords and masters while being slaves.

It is called OS because fear of calling God *Abba* is the origin of all other sins: *I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow* - Lk.19.21. Like the man who buried his talents through fear - humankind did likewise.

It makes no difference if God is truly the loving Father, as long as we are afraid of being judged by results - good deeds become idolatry when they reflect fear of a demanding God. The first sin is thought to have been pride. [Pride and lack of trust belong together - Gen.3]. NT view of sin is lack of trust in God's fatherly care. God is not in competition with anybody.

OT: In summary OT = *I will be your God, and you will be my people... keep my laws and I will look after your interests. Rebel and I will treat you as enemies*. Moses saw the relationship between God and his people on what he saw in Egypt between Pharaoh and his people.

Once the people of Israel broke the covenant, contact with God was finished. The Covenant was broken many times, yet prophet after prophet spoke of God giving them *one more chance*. Till it became clear that a new expression of covenant was needed:

At that time," declares the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people." This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find favour in the wilderness; I will come to give rest to Israel." The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again

Jer.31.31-34.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

Ezk.36.28.

NT: It was Jesus who introduced the New Covenant, in which God says to every individual: *I will be your Abba, and you will be my child*. The model for this has to be unconditional and everlasting. By now it was apparent that the OT had not gone far enough to picture the real love and faithfulness of God.

What was needed was an unbreakable, unilateral agreement from God - *once a father, always a father*. No matter how many times the children stray: *even if these desert you, I will never disown you* - Ps.26(27).10. The place at the Father's table will always have a chair - even empty.

Candle and White Garment: The light that had grown in intensity - till it shone forth in Jesus - is the Easter Candle, from which candles are lit during baptism. The white garment symbolises the same thing. What brings wonder to parents is knowing: *child, you are mine*; as God also affirms: *child, you are mine*. The garment is white, because God cannot see stains. If God can't see stains - then there aren't any. *You are my beloved, I am delighted with you, not because you promise to stay out of trouble, but because you are mine, and always will be*. The darkness that the light of Christ dispels is *the fear that God is a stranger and a hard taskmaster*.

Water: can be looked at in 3 ways - *we rise into newness; leaving behind what needs to be washed away*. Jesus was satisfied if he found faith *in those presenting the candidate* - Mk.2.5. What is drowned and left behind is the fear that prevents believing that God is Abba. The fear of being different is also drowned: *black/white, male/female, well/sick, rich/poor...* God loves us individually and uniquely because we are his. However sinful I may be, I am God's child - sinning! His love is still with me; my salvation, stronger than sin. *Nothing can separate us from the love of God* - Rom.8.31.

Response

Morality: *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins* - 1Jn.4.10.

Being good doesn't earn us a place in heaven. We don't deserve God's favour by behaving. God loves because he chooses to; by the same token, God doesn't stop loving me because of my sin. His love and forgiveness are ever available - if only I believe it.

So, why bother being good? Being good is saying *thank-you* - to a Father who loves me whether I say thank-you or not. I do it, not with any sense of repaying a debt, but to show how real God's love is, how free from fear; imagine how well we could skate on ice if we had no fear of the consequences of falling.

Christian morality rises from such fearlessness - knowing my sin is forgiven even while committing them. True morality is gratitude - sin is ingratitude - which is why OS is fear of God as taskmaster; the origin of sin must be removed before gratitude can start. OS is our basic insecurity of being an orphan - which has seek security elsewhere.

The Incarnation: how do we know God is asking us to be like him? Jesus' vocation was not simply to tell us what Abba is like. Once Jesus had told us and shown us, it becomes obvious that the way to please anyone is to be like him. God sends the sun and rain equally on friend and foe. Be as kind to enemies as to friends. *You received without charge, give without charge* - Mt.10.8.

Jesus makes the invisible God visible, by treating everyone with respect because they have the same claim to God's love as he has - did they but know it. He died forgiving his murderers. There is no free service to another which can compare

with forgiving him/her as he/she kills you - Jn.15.13. *Father, forgive them... Not forgive them if they repent!*

Miracles: Jesus was admired by friend: *he went around doing good* - Acts.10.38, and foe: *All were astonished* Mt.12.23. His miracles do not prove anything about him - but present a true picture of God. God does not avoid the leper - Mk.1.40; is suspicious of the Romans - Mt.8.5; or foreigners - Mk.7.24. He presents God as *the friend of life*, the enemy of death. The God we cannot see.

Forgiveness of sin: there is one built-in condition to the Good News: *If I accept God's forgiveness of my sin, I must accept the forgiveness of everybody else's sin.* The story of the Prodigal invites us to put on the shoes of the elder brother before judging another. The father invites him to the celebration - we are not told if he attended. Jesus can't tell us the end of the story because it depends on the choice his listeners would make.

Jesus said: *Judge not and you will not be judged...* God cannot welcome two brothers/sisters if they can't stand each other. Life is God's party - and he is showing us our fellow guests. There can be no *its either him/her or me!* Salvation does not depend on whether or not I succeed in forgiving, in my own eyes. Forgiving is not a burden, judging is. Jesus asks us to drop it and take up his burden - *my yoke is easy, my burden light...*Mt.11.28.

Brotherly love: we all come from one Father - and this makes us of one family. Animals, plants, minerals and the rest of the universe also enjoy this one origin: *the whole world is my cloister where sisters and brothers live* - Francis. All belongs to each one - *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality* - 2Cor.8.12.

Paul refers to cells of one body - 1cor.12.12; John speaks of a vine of branches - Jn.15.5; Jesus spoke of a flock with one shepherd - Jn.10.16. The Jews thought of themselves as one nation with one father, Israel, one leader, Moses [even though there were 12 tribes]. Jesus carried on the 12 tradition with the Apostles, but in one universal kingdom, one God.

Spirit of Unity: as well as being the Spirit of Adoption, the Spirit is of unity - with one Father. Jesus is the head, who taught us to call God Abba; and gave us his Spirit so that we can experience this.. This is pre-eminently manifest as *forgiveness*. To be of God is to be forgiven. And my advocate, the Spirit, asks *where is your sister/brother?*

Incarnation today: Jesus is what the invisible God looks like. To see him is to see *Abba*. To hear him is to hear God. There is more: if they heard, and saw, and followed him they would be converted - *learn to call God Abba*, and experience forgiveness. How do we *experience* forgiveness? *A voice that speaks of peace, peace in your heart* - Psalm.85.8.

Our vocation is to make God present by the way we are present. We don't have to be sinless to do this. It is the Prodigals who often give the better witness. This witness has as many ways as there are witnesses. I certainly can't pray like Francis of Assisi, but neither could Francis pray like me! It is not always the brightest who know how - in the devastating Tsunami of 2011 caught everyone by surprise - but not the *wild-life!* They had all disappeared hours before.

The Way: before ever the early followers of Jesus were known as *Christians* they were known as followers of *The Way*. Which John attributes to Jesus, who said: *I am the Way...* The way was the way of the cross - *take up your cross*

daily... The Way is Jesus' way of calling God Abba, God is Abba, the world provides the cross. The journey is not just physical, our everyday living, it is also spiritual; from being like Adam and Eve to being just like God; and Jesus shows us the way, by walking through the gates showing us that it is always open. He praises the unjust steward for tearing-up the owner's bills and making them smaller.

Conscience: at first sight Jesus never seems to speak about conscience, he constantly refers to it as *the Father's will*; which he even calls his *food: my food is to do the will of the one who sent me* - Jn.4.34.

For us, as for Jesus, conscience is the *means* by which the Father communicates. Conscience is my judgment about the action facing me; the gap between me as I am and me as I ought to be, to honour my commitment - made in Baptism. The person I *could* be is to be like God: *I and the Father are one* says Jesus - Jn.10.30.

There's confusion between the *is* and the *ought* in me. If I fail, I know my conscience will forgive me, because my conscience is the Father's will, who never holds my past against me. This is why conscience is not our resident tyrant but a loving invitation to *reach for the stars; I'll catch you if you fall*.

I reveal the God I really serve through the way I am living. There's no getting away from *the incarnation* - there is no one who does not make flesh the god he serves: *by their fruits...* Worship money and we become like money... To honour our baptismal word means getting up each time we fall and try again. *Unless you become like little children...* watch a child learning to walk, and constantly stumbling, but always gets up and tries again. Isn't this what Jesus meant when he promised we would do even greater things than he did - Jn.14.12?

Confirmation: Baptism celebrates the gift of God; Confirmation celebrates the invitation to be like him. In Baptism, Jesus is the light that enlightens us; our rock foundation to build on; God the architect who works pro bono. In Confirmation we celebrate God's permanent invitation to be light and rock for others, to serve - always pro bono.

Transfiguration: is really the model of confirmation. The Transfiguration follows Jesus' baptism, it doesn't come first. In Baptism the voice from heaven said: *You are my beloved Son*. In the transfiguration the voice says to us - *listen to my Son*. Saying what? Listen as he shows by word and example what God is *really* like - listen to him during his trial, not worrying about what to say, simply answering the question: *yes I am my Father's Son!*

The cloud that covers them at the Transfiguration is the glory of the Spirit, making all this happen. Confirmation is what God has to say about each candidate - *this is my beloved - listen to him/her*.

The Character of Confirmation: if the character of Baptism is giving us each a special place at the table, the character of confirmation lets us drink from the cup - the Chalice is the way Jesus speaks of his Father's will for him - and for us. We all have our own unique destiny - God doesn't make copies!.

There is a song only you can sing, a song that only I can sing - we are called to be like Abba, and *you-being-just-like* Abba is something only you/I can be: *I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it*. - Rev.2.17.

Once given - it never needs giving again. If we had to re-confirm failures, we would deny God's unconditional love, and imply God had stopped loving because of the lack of response.

Morality is freely undertaken as *thank-you* to God, who loves us first, and never stops: *How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?* - Ps.116.12.

God's Will not already written: not already fixed. There is no blueprint with the name Austin McCormack - *Instructions!* If I fail at any time God doesn't have to do a patch-up job so that I will fit the blueprint again - there's no blueprint, for me or for anything!

God relates to me where I am, regardless of how I got here - I make the agenda. I am perfectly free to do so, but having created and acted on it, I am not free to avoid its consequences.

Redemption

Cross as Sacrifice: before the coming of Christ, it was felt necessary to perform rituals to placate angry deities. Even the Jewish people, who believed in the only God, a loving God, offered sacrifices: holocausts, communion sacrifices, atonement sacrifices. In their holocausts - the whole victim was burnt on the altar - in communion sacrifices, after the blood had been sprinkled round the altar, part was given to God by burning, part to the priest and part to the family bringing the offering. In *atonement sacrifices* no part was eaten, blood was sprinkled to cleanse the people of sin, and to mend the broken covenant.

Sacrifices cost. To withhold the first harvest fruits, the best animals - to destroy them as a sign to God that his people recognise everything as gift. Families were even known to sacrifice first-born children into the Lord's service.

After Jesus had died and been seen again in the Resurrection, and the Spirit had dawned on his followers at Pentecost that the sacrifices they were still offering - Acts.12.26 - were now irrelevant: once a man or woman can call God *Abba*, expressing trust in God, there was no point in such rituals to placate God - who was always with us!

Jesus' death was, for the disciples *the Good News in action*, in the Resurrection they believed it was always so - the resurrection was the end of sacrifices. Soon they realised that Jesus' death must have been a sacrifice - so complete as to render all other sacrifices redundant.

He was the *victim*, his blood sprinkled as the new covenant was born. He was *priest*, as the priest entered the holy of holies into the presence of God to intercede for others, this was his permanent abode - *I and the Father are one* - Jn.10.30. His obedience - to do the Father's will.

It was never the Father's will that he should suffer and die - but to do whatever it takes to show who God really is - nothing other than self-emptying love. It was the refusal to believe him that brought the suffering. He promised to be faithful in his mission of showing God to be *Abba* - and not count the cost intransigence would bring. How sad, even today, hymns proclaim *sent him to die!* No wonder it is followed by *I scarce can take it in!* A human being had called God *Abba*, and refused to back down - even with suffering and death.

His Obedience: in Gethsemane, he could run away, or stay and face the consequences. Running away would mean being unfaithful to *Abba* - not that *Abba* wanted him to suffer, but wanted to get the truth about God, nothing else but love and forgiveness out into the open, hopefully as a welcome message, but present whatever the reception: *whoever sees me, Philip, sees the Father* - Jn.14.9. If Jesus had run away he would be denying God is *Abba*; because there are limits to love!

Are you the one who is to come? - Mt.11.3. Which means do you have the right to call God Abba, and to make this available to sinners and foreigners? Jesus died for his experience of God as Abba.

Saviour: we know of God's mercy because the apostles had the courage to preach it; they had the courage because they had *witnessed* the Resurrection; he was faithful to his promise to Abba. As a consequence, all of us have hope because of this - not only those who have heard of Jesus. *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy - Titus.3.4-5.* He is Saviour because, it was from him we learned about God, as *Abba*; who gave us the courage to believe, and to seek to become what we believe.

Redemption: the process of getting sinful humankind into right relationship with God, we call redemption; *at-one-ment - atonement.* There is no question of *paying* God for this gift. Freedom is obtained for all. It cost Jesus his life, the price he had to pay to remain faithful to Abba - demanded by humankind, not by God.

Did God send Jesus to his death? Certainly not. [*sent him to die!!!*]. See Jesus in Gethsemane struggling to be faithful - when *the system* threatened death. Are there times in my life when adhering to truth is greater than holding onto life [*the martyrs*]? The truth Jesus died for set the world free.

He emptied himself: Phil.2.7. There is a sense in which every child is its father's equal, since both share the same nature. Jesus called God *Abba*. He knew it and experienced it, evident from his life as servant.

Heaven is free, no entrance fee, no *terms and conditions apply*. Doing his Father's will was not a condition he had to accept; following conscience was not a condition - read the story of the Prodigal - Lk.15.21. Even though the prodigal was determined to apologise - his father wouldn't hear of it. *Doing the Father's will* is the way to say thank-you for the loving care a child receives from mum and dad. Parents don't demand it - but welcome it when freely given.

Morality is imitation of God. We don't have to imitate to earn love. If I genuinely wish to say thank-you I will want to be like him - to live as he lives. God is self-giving servant - we see this in Jesus [*washing the feet etc.*] He wanted to make sure that their last memory of him had the right priorities:

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

Jn.13.1-11.

We cannot benefit God directly, but we can show our desire to serve, by serving others likewise. Inviting him to serve others through us; becoming his hands and feet. *Act as if everything depended on you; believe everything depends on God* - Ignatius of Loyola. We fantasise about being lord and master, while being serfs; Jesus is the opposite.

The drop of water: *By the mixing of this water and wine may we come to share in his divinity, who humbled himself to share our humanity* - Wine symbolises the divine; water, like the bread, symbolises what is human. Jesus is divine [*wine*], he took on our slavery [*water*] so that we could be set free from slavery, become daughters and sons like himself. Jesus is turning the water [*us*] into wine - which is himself.

Grace: what is Grace? I first thought of it as a *thing*. Because God poured it into us, it was like liquid; and God could give more or less of it. The Catechism says: *Grace is a supernatural gift of God, freely given to make us holy...* which tells me nothing! I still ask *what is Grace*.

Grace is a *relationship* - like having a husband or wife, brother or sister, father, mother, friend... Relationships change us. Grace changes us by making God *Abba* - it comes with Baptism, or whenever a person discovers God is *Abba*. That the deepest reality [*God*] is incurably friendly. Our eyes are only opened gradually to see this, starting with Baptism.

Abba can't be spoken without a father, a child and a spirit. Jesus was the first to say *Abba*, in the mutuality [*the love they share*] in the one Spirit.

Childlike: we call our natural father by a special name as children, and it persists into adult life. Jesus wants us - as adults - to do this with *Abba* [*or its equivalent*] - this is the surest way into the Mystery of God - give self over to God in trust as a child trusts its parent. S Francis reminds us that simply longing for this is never enough - it must be longing *with all my heart*. God loves me unconditionally, not because I'm good, but because God is good. Once I begin to believe and live this, I will never confuse childlike with childish.

Conversion - Repentance: becoming childlike and relishing the Good News [*God is Abba*] is synonymous with repentance. Anyone who is afraid of God in any way [*e.g. fearing God's justice*] needs a change of heart - until I really believe *God loves me exactly as I am - no conditions-apply!*

Amendment: is not a condition for forgiveness. God loves me, even in the heart of my sin - making my sinfulness an asset, it is my entitlement to Christ, who said *I have come for sinners* - do I believe this *with all my heart*; wanting to become like him, and to forgive as I am forgiven.

In Luke.7.36 we have the woman anointing Jesus' feet, drying them with her hair. She loved him *because her sins were forgiven* - she did not have her sins forgiven because she loved him! Jesus went to Zacchaeus house *before* he decided to mend his ways, not after: Lk.19.1-10.

Faith: is believing what I say when I call God *Abba*; believing my sins are forgiven; believing God wants me to be his child. In this sense faith justifies me [*how often does Jesus say your faith has healed you?*] - I am God's child, if only I believe it! Good deeds, morality, come afterwards, as my *thank-you*. Jesus is central to my faith. I believe I can call God *Abba*, because he is with me to tell me so through his living, dying and rising; and for everybody else - which asks for my respect - be they friend or foe. My father is *our father*.

Fear of God: Scripture says *fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*: Prov.9.10; *fear of God is not the same as being afraid of God*. To be afraid of God is the

opposite of believing the Good News. *Fear of God* - means being afraid of seeking security other than in God, who is the Father of Jesus. Building life on the rock of Jesus' word: *You can call God Abba!*

Building massively to enter heaven without any need for God is not *good fear* of the Lord. Nor is digging a hole and burying my talent. A lost child is afraid, but not when his father arrives.

The Seed: the parable says the seed that is sown, germinates and grows, it is the Word of God: *you are my beloved child. I am delighted with you.* Seed starts as a tiny event, then grows till it fills consciousness; then I discover people come to find security in its shade. What starts as faith blossoms into love. What starts as trust becomes good works. What starts as seed becomes seed-bearing. What starts as baptised, becomes confirmed. The seed grows of its own accord. God speaks the Word for us to hear..

Prayer: the language between us and God. It follows our unfolding relationship with God, and expresses it. *The way we pray is the way we believe.* In Gethsemane, the night before he died, Jesus prayed: *Abba, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, only what you want!* He invited us to pray to *Our Father...*

Prayer is the language of those who actively receive the gift of God's presence; and wanting to become like God - *thy will be done...* It is Grace that lets us pray as Jesus prayed - calling God Abba. We can also ask one-another for help and respond confidently to others as Jesus did through that same Spirit. Praying in the Spirit makes us people of hope - by occasionally letting us experience Jesus' presence.

No Strange Gods: whatever god we worship, we become like that god. If we worship money that is who we become - so too if worship success, we start to praise and condemn by the rules of success... blaming when success doesn't happen. Baptism lets us become temples of the Spirit.

Idolatry has its own grace, its own relationship and worship. Listening to prayers gives a good idea of the kind god being worshipped.

Love: *Faith is the beginning, the end is love* - Ignatius of Antioch. The love that matters is God's love for us - then our love in return. Jesus sent the disciples out in twos - the witness of two united by love is brighter than one person talking about love. Jesus taught us to pray *Our Father*, not my Father, everyone is uniquely God's favourite. Peter and Paul both say God has no favourites [Acts.10.34; Rom.2.11] - because everyone is favoured into existence.

There is an important difference between the Jewish concept of *people of God*, and the Christian concept. The salvation God offered to the Jews was to the Jewish people. The people were more important than the individual. If the individual deserted the people, he was lost. In the Christian concept one does not have to qualify by any standards of behaviour, or the good fortune of birth. Everyone, bar none, enjoys such favour. There is no question of sacrificing the individual for the sake of the whole people.

Like any good family, humankind must take its time moving by the slowest among us. To leave even one behind is to leave Christ behind.

Church and Sacraments

The Church is the community of the Resurrection - those who believe because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that it is safe to call God *Abba*.

After his Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost - awareness grew of a sense of mission. Those first disciples knew that he, his truth, was from God. Jesus - human, knew God as Abba, and now all who share humanity with him are invited to do likewise. They became aware that the whole world needed to know about this, and they should go out and tell the whole world.

We are the present disciples - *we are Church for the world*. We are asked to be living evidence that God is forgiveness. We don't believe in sin - but in the forgiveness of sin.

Right and Left Hand: we can easily be alarmed by some of Jesus' parables, as if they are dividing humankind into good and bad people. What they are actually doing is *dividing the good from the bad within all people*.

When we read of God separating sheep and goats, we can see ourselves in both camps and worrying where we really are.. *I was hungry and you fed me* - everyone who has cooked for others, every wage earner providing daily bread are continuing as sheep when: *I was hungry and you gave me no food* - when we pass-by *on the other side* - we are as goats.

It is helpful in reading the parable of weeds and wheat to think of ourselves as the field; we, humankind - are the field. In all of us there is wheat and weeds. The way the whole person is saved is through love and forgiveness. Note: becoming aware of God's assured love and forgiveness lets it rub off onto us. There is no way I can do this without some *experience* of my being gratuitously loved into forgiveness.

Judgement: *Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to save it* - Jn.12.47. There are two conditions proper to salvation - the first: *God is my Abba*. The second: *a willingness to forgive as I am forgiven. Judge not and you will not be judged* - Lk.6.37.

There is only one pure gold that fire cannot destroy - *God's love for us*. No point in chasing after honour, fame, wealth... since God loves me whether I am disgraced or honoured, sick or well. If I think my good works earn heaven for me, or allow me to criticise evil actions, I'm due for a shock - like the labourers in the vineyard, or the elder brother of the prodigal. The essence of every good work is gratitude to God for achieving this through me.

Death: is when everything perishable perishes. Rust is forming, leaves falling. Fear of death is natural, and is an essential factor for survival. Humankind has an added inclination to fear - judgement.

Jesus says God loves me as his child, alive or dead; and this covenant between God and me cannot be broken, even by death: *I am the resurrection and the life. The ones who believe in me will live, even though they die* - Jn.11.25. He also shows us *how to die*. He died insisting God is Abba [*into your hands I commend my spirit*] and forgiving his enemies.

To onlookers it seemed that if this were true, God would never allow this cruelty to happen. Jesus may well have felt abandoned: *And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")* - Mk.15.34. *He descended into hell...* [*the absence of God*] Jesus died and was buried, like all humankind.

Hell: the state of those [*if there are any*] who refuse to accept God as Father, or to share God's forgiveness with the others whom God has forgiven. The Church has never said there is anybody in hell... not Judas, or Hitler... Life is a serious business because hell is a possibility, and our one life-time is the limit of time available to us to accept or reject God's love.

God does not send anyone to hell. Remember, fear of God is the Original Sin. Jesus' mission was dedicated to removing fear - how often does he say do not be afraid?

Purgatory: the name for those being purified. Divine freedom and human freedom are a mystery. God holds the possibility of salvation open for all, everyone willing to receive. The doctrine of Purgatory is a sign of this.

Purgatory is not a place and certainly not a concentration camp. It is the experience of meeting God face-to-face, and realising that it is all true – that God loves me, always has, always will and loves me exactly as I am. It is a pure work of mercy – the last chance granted to us, while offering the chance for the Church community to lend prayerful support during this soul searing experience [*it is holy and wholesome to pray for the dead*].

When I'm aware of having freely and seriously hurt someone, and at the same time realise that it is not being held against me – can I simply smile and say thank-you, or is there need for something more? To be told it's all right, don't worry is surely not sufficient. It's not all right for me and I will need some space and time first to try to recover my self-respect – and then come back and say thank-you. God does not send anyone to Purgatory because we are not good enough.

There sadly are times when God is not big enough for me – my sinful times – but there never will be a time when I am not big enough for God – and I will need space and time [*a place where souls suffer on a/c of sin*] to feel free to return and say thank-you.

God wants us to live, not die – *I have come that you may have life in abundance*. Seeing Christ as judge – has him come to judge the living and the dead – *take the context of that judgement from the fact Christ died for every single individual* - is it likely he will be a vengeful judge? Gaze at the cross, and having said sin has done this – my sin – to Jesus saying: to me: *you will be lost over my dead body*.

Saints: *ordinary folk, doing ordinary things, extraordinarily well* – Basil Hume. A young refugee girl was being interviewed about her homeless situation, and was asked it must be awful not to have a home? She looked puzzled and said - oh, we have a home - we just don't have anywhere to put it!

What a profound statement! All Saints is the feast of all sorts, the ordinary saints of the church, the huge number, impossible to count of every nation, race, tribe and language, who don't have St prefixing their names.

It is the feast of the mums and dads who have been gentle and merciful. It is the feast of the grandparents and neighbours who have been there and supportive. It is the feast of children and young people who have been peacemakers and thirsted for what is right. It is the feast of those who have been persecuted in the cause of right. We remember the ordinary folk who have done ordinary things extraordinarily well... we can all name names

One of the greatest affirmations possible is waiting for mums and dads, when God will say when I came to you hungry you fed me... clothed me... looked after me.... You loved me when I came to you as your baby. You never gave up on me when I rebelled, you didn't judge me...

Heaven: Heaven is not a place located above the earth. Heaven is God and God cannot be localised. God does not have an address. But we are constrained to use language and imagery we can understand. Through death we come to God as human beings. The life that was begun and developed here on earth by God

through creation and redemption, is fully realised through and after death, where we will find a life, the same eternal life, which we have begun to know now in and through faith.

We tend to fix people in their past, as though what they were they will be forever. Our risen life will not be a matter of our being frozen within an already established way [*like a snap-shot*]. There is no standstill and there is no end in terms of a static existence. Misunderstandings arise here due, mainly, to a wrong emphasis on the word eternal at the expense of the word life. When we speak of eternal rest we usually know what we mean, what we should not mean is separation of soul and body.

We even locate the activity of God in the past: Creation happened so many million years ago; Salvation happened 2,000 years ago; even sin is called original.

When the NT says: Then we will know as we are known - 1Cor.13.12, we are being given a specific meaning of the word know. It does not mean information, but knowing through communion, becoming one with intimately: One who does not know love cannot know God - Jn.2.3. Knowing God after death is not knowing *about* God, it is not a course in theology, it is *experiencing* God in an entirely new way:

Thus we have come to know and believe in the love God has for us... this is how love has reached its perfection in us so that we may have confidence on the day of judgement... In love there is no room for fear, perfect love gets rid of all fear... 1Jn.4.16 18.

Heaven can be imaged as this life in faith moving into an experience in which there is no room for doubt, ambiguity or misunderstanding, but total conviction through experience in a communion with the love God has for us. Heaven is not a glorified holiday camp, a place of eternal inertia. It is God and God is life. Heaven begins here on earth in as much as we open ourselves to the many ways God is with us: *we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we do know that when he appears we will be like he is, for we shall know him as he is* 1Jn.3.2.

The ways in which we are like God now are often reached through laborious effort, very much within the structure of the cross, stumbling within a faith that cannot see and, from time to time, even daring to hope against hope. We are aware of being like Christ crucified through our own sufferings, but what difference does Jesus risen make?

Because we are still in faith, *we see now only as in a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then shall I understand as fully as I am understood* - 1Cor.13.12. It is only in the light of the present and the experience of the past that we can say anything meaningful about the future. But this cannot establish the future definitively for us, since there will always be more and more to discover in God: *No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart conceived what God has prepared for those who love...* 1Cor.2.9. Is.64.4.

God has created and redeemed us and will fulfil us as persons. We will live with God in a different way, as the persons we are now but totally open through communion and belonging. We always achieve personhood with and through others in some form of belonging, friendship, family, community, colleagues and the like.

The perfection of our personhood involves those who have been part of our growing in whatever way. Our communication and our relationships with others

are not destroyed in death, since that would mean that our personhood disappears, they are experienced in a new way, as Jesus told Nicodemus.

When someone close to us dies, the person we know disappears and this disappearance makes it impossible to have any tangible contact between the living and the dead or, between those living on earth and those living with God. But this does not exclude the possibility of relationship and communication.

Life in heaven has to be for persons who are and who will remain fully themselves, since love can only be experienced by one person in relationship with another: *Whoever loses life for my sake, gains it* - Lk.9.24; Matt.16.25; Mk.8.35; Jn.12.25. This means that eternal life is enjoying the free and total self-giving of the Creator and Redeemer God in the glorified Christ, through which human beings, made in this image and likeness, finally achieve full identity.

Sacrament: Jesus is the Sacrament of God - a sign that makes invisible God visible. Jesus is *the Sacrament*, the one and only Son of God, who makes God visible in a way no one else could. The Church is a sacrament, because our mission is to make people who see us say: *So that is what God looks like*.

Seven Sacraments: seven special celebrations within the community of the Resurrection. As light through a prism shows a rainbow of colours [*red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet*] so Christ, *Light of the world*, can be seen under seven aspects.

Water can express new life, perils, drowning; Bread feeds the traveller; Oil expresses healing or royal status; Marriage vows an expression of enduring love. The seven sacraments are visible signs of the God we cannot see, revealed in Jesus, the Christ. The Sacraments all have actions whose meaning is made clear in words - always including Jesus' words.

Celebrations: Sacraments are signs that bring about what they signify. Symbols are not as clear cut as definitions - that is why descriptions cannot pin symbols down.

Baptism celebrates the gift of God. Entry into the community where everybody is a first-born, and nobody is judged; baptism creates community. In Baptism God says *this my child in whom I am well pleased...* *Confirmation* says *this is my beloved child, listen to him/her*. Through being loved we learn to love in return, to be with, to serve willingly, so creating the framework where God's word is heard - the Church.

Eucharist - is Christ really present in word and sacrament. When we receive the body and blood of Christ we pray to become one body. Every family has its own table, where it celebrates its table ministry - the way and the how we come together, each family differently. We gather for the Eucharist, where in contrast to our family eating - when the food becomes part of us; in the Eucharist we become one in the food we share. One body, one spirit in Christ - *out of many, one* - Rom.12.4.

Reconciliation - *experiences* the forgiveness Jesus brought. In Baptism we celebrate - *I will be your Father* - Eucharist celebrates that this covenant does not break under our repeated infidelities. In the Eucharistic Community *forgiveness* is felt and cherished. Read how Paul takes Corinthians to task over the way they celebrate - [1Cor.11.17-34].

We are forgiven long before we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation - where we celebrate something that has already happened.

Anointing - God's care for the sick. This care is evident wherever there is compassion - no matter by whom. The Sacrament of the sick is evidence of sickness as evil in the world. Not moral evil; more like a cancerous growth. For Jesus, forgiveness of sin and cure of disease are closely linked. Seeking the Sacrament of the sick is in faith, seeing illness as something to be overcome. This needs courage - which is why oil is used, the symbol of strength. It points to Eucharist and fullness of life.

The response to illness is never resignation; even when the illness is terminal. Christ heals the sick, heals, and forgives - faith in God is faith in healing: *even though you die, yet shall you live...* Jn.11.25. St James writes: *bring in the priests of the Church* - the sick person desire to be restored to health within the community. Christianity is to do with forgiveness, which is vastly different from cancellation. It is who we are - am I a forgiving person, or am I unforgiving? Faith asserts there is a stronger power than death in our world: *your sins are forgiven your faith makes you whole.*

Marriage - This is the foundation for relationship, a marriage of dependence and independence. Every relationship calls for surrender but never for self-annihilation. Give and take is involved, invitation and response. True relationships never impair freedom; rather do they enhance it. You must love God or you must love me are meaningless phrases. Must and love do not belong together - other than the must that starts from within my experience, rather than an outer imposition: *the very stones will cry-out* - Lk.19.40.

The lover helps me become myself and become ever more myself. Difference does not mean incompatibility - lovers rejoice in the difference [*not the sameness*] of the other. Father, Son and Spirit are infinitely different and totally one. Is this rare relationship available to mere mortals?

It is only possible with God; but we cannot reach God - we have been reached by God; and God's offer is not a message, but a person like ourselves. God becomes like us so that we can become like God. This is the secret contained in sacrament. Sacrament takes two - one who gives and one who receives. The act of receiving is what we mean by faith.

Many ask for God to be part of their wedding ceremony - So, why be here in Church? They ask that the ceremony somehow reflect that in their love for each other, they found something of God! That is the wrong way round... God is nothing else but self-emptying love... wherever there is genuine, self-giving love, there is God. So - being in love means not that you find God in each other - but in love/God you have found each other....

Sacramental Sacrifice: The Eucharist is also called a sacrifice. The infant Church stopped attending Temple worship and sacrifices when they found they no longer needed them; but they continued to do each week what Jesus had done with the twelve at the Last Supper.

Sacrifices stopped with Jesus' death - seen as the perfect sacrifice for all time. The Mass cannot be seen as *another sacrifice*. It is the same sacrifice celebrated at the Last Supper in a sacramental way - *my body, my blood*.

In the Passover Israel was led by Moses, under God's providence, out of slavery, to freedom through the waters. Ever afterwards Jewish families, in re-enacting that night, remind themselves that *God never changes; God loved us then and loves us now.*

At the Last Supper Jesus was saying: *Do not do this in memory of Moses any more. Do it in memory of me. Remember if God loves you this much tonight, God never changes, the love you see tonight is true, till I come and fetch you.*

The Eucharist is the paschal mystery by which we are freed from slavery to sin through the *exodus* of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. The Mass is not celebrating a birthday, but a living sacrifice offered once and for all time. In taking his body as our bread we are accepting the gift of God; in taking the chalice we are responding to this gift.

Mediator: Jesus the only mediator between creator and created - the one and only Son, able to call God *Abba*. His mission was to pass on his experience of God, by living a full human life and death and gifting the ability to do the same through the Spirit by which he lived, to any who would receive it.

The Resurrection showed that he had come from God, a mission sealed with this indelible signature. If we desire anything of God it is always *through Christ our Lord*; having called God *Abba*, with him. It is in his words and sacraments that we can see and hear God-with-us.

Jesus is God made visible; who says: *I will be your father, and you my child* - 2Cor.6.18. Jesus incorporates us [*one human nature*] with himself and together we go to *Abba*; who looks on us: *this is my child, the beloved*.

The Day of the Lord: an expression that appears frequently in OT and among the Prophets. The day is coming when truth will prevail: *A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened* - Dan.7.10. *The Books* - are whatever has actually happened in history, not the doctored accounts.

When Jesus was first seen raised from the dead, it was the first day of the week - Jn.20.1. Jesus was unjustly condemned, and God is now vindicating him. Jesus had promised to incorporate the poor in this - so he is only the start, the first fruits of a mighty harvest.

In pagan culture the first day of the week was the day of the sun. The Gospel incorporates this: *Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb* - Mk.16.2. The light of the risen Christ, the dawn of the Day of the Lord. Ever since, *Sunday* has been the Lord's day among Christians.

Even before NT writings were completed the Christian Passover - Eucharist - was celebrated in association with dark of Saturday night and the dawn of Sunday morning:

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight - Acts.20.7.1.

Church and Morality

I and nobody else hear God calling me - others hear God calling them, but they can't hear God calling me. Once I know God as *Abba*, as with Jesus' conscience, now my conscience is my way to *Abba's* will. *Call no man your father on earth - you have but one father...* Mt.23.9. I was taught that the moral teaching of the Church and the Pope cannot be wrong.

There is a fatal flaw in that argument, my conscience would be bound by the conscience of somebody else - moral slavery! Catholic teaching has always held I must follow my conscience, even when my conscience is in error.

So that even if what the Pope says, which conflicts with my conscience, is correct I am still bound to follow my own conscience. No one else can tell me what I must think or do; only what they think I *ought* to do. I am called by God

to follow what I see as truth, not what they see. Revelation does not provide exact knowledge of what to do or not.

Ten Commandments: are not ten new rules dropped from heaven to Moses. On the whole they could be found in the ethical rules of other cultures. Moses' inspiration was to pick out ten rules from existing legislations which make the difference between a nation and no nation, and put them into a framework of a covenant between God and his people.

Moses' law insisted that if you love God, you must do right by other people as well. The ten things forbidden by the ten commandments are forbidden by God by God *because they are wrong*, not wrong because God forbids them.

Jesus' Moral teaching: *The two great commandments* - Jesus reduced the Mosaic Law to two commandments:

The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.
Mk.12.29-31.

The first corresponds to the first three; the second to the remaining seven.

Jesus' own moral teaching: he gave us a *new commandment: love one another as I have loved you* - Jn.13.34; 15.12. *God is Abba, your father, who loves you unconditionally; I have loved you unconditionally, and will do so always; so that you see in me what you see in Abba. When you have seen what he is like, thank him by imitating him as I have shared with you.*

He gave many moral commands - *do not judge; do not worry about tomorrow; when you party, invite those who can't invite you back; don't look miserable when you fast; pray like this; don't store up treasure on earth...* and many more. They are nearly all ethical teachings which can be found in non-Christian sources, before and after Jesus.

All his commands can be reduced to his one *new command*, God saying: *I will be your father and you will be my child* - human morality is always in terms of *thank-you Father. How can I become like you?* Neither Jesus nor Moses brought instructions, only a new framework. Jesus leaves it to his followers, once they *experience* God as Abba, to decide for themselves what is right:

Why do you not judge for yourselves the right thing to do? -
Lk.12.57.

Not just any kind of morality: Jesus' teaching, and Church teaching do not provide a set of ready-answers. Christian teaching will not fit with just any well-meaning humanist morality. See two levels: one, the deepest meaning of *goodness, or who we think God is*; the other, how best we reflect that same goodness in the way we live, in the choices we are faced with. Christians can and will differ - even among themselves - as to the best way of expressing goodness in the way we choose to live.

The God Jesus reveals to us is universal love, no exclusions. Those who *experienced* God in OT often seem to have thought of him as being exclusive and choosy. God is the father of Israel, so if you are a good Israelite, you are under the fatherhood of God. You have to be a good Israelite first - and there's the rub. For Jesus, you don't have to be a good anything, you just have to be! Any attempt to put the good of the majority, or of the State as the ultimate good, is contrary to Jesus' teaching.

If the system or the State, or the majority decides to exclude even one; to settle for the 99 sheep and abandon the 1 - they are less Christian:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Mt.25.31-46.

If you love me: morality is free - *if you love me - you will keep my commandments* - Jn.14.15. If we do not love, it does not stop Jesus loving us! We do not earn love by good behaviour, but by being who we already are *children of Abba*, by the Father's choice.

Where do laws come from? Laws are formed by pooling a community's experience of following conscience; discovering that certain forms of behaviour lead to the well-being of the community, while other forms are detrimental. Laws are a distillation of past experience and can never be held more sacred than present experience, since the only authority for the laws comes from experience.

Likewise with Church law - stems from the *experience* of previous generations reflecting in the Spirit on what is judged to be right. Take the Sunday obligation - is based on past experience of former generations: *all members must attend, if one did not attend regularly, one lost touch with the community - and therefore with Christ.*

Any law is only as sound as the reasons for putting it in place. The fact that a law has been there for as long as anyone can remember does not give it authority, once *experience* shows good reasons for removing it: *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath* - Mk.2.27. If the conscience of past generations says one thing, and my conscience says something different, I must follow conscience. The law was once *today's conscience*, was once today's link with the Father's will.

Not situation ethics: *Situation ethics* means if you see a line of action as right, and I see it as wrong, we both may be correct! Catholic ethics holds we cannot both be right. There is only one God - the way forward is through moral discussion, but in the meantime you must do what you see to be right.

How can the one God lead us into truth by different paths? How can obedience to an erroneous conscience be the way to the light? Genesis describes Abraham's dilemma over being asked to sacrifice Isaac as a test; as if Abraham had to show willingness to do what God appeared to be asking. The search for God throughout OT is a series of corrections of what had been sincerely held before.

How can following an erroneous conscience be the best way to the light? The story of Abraham's race does not apologise for following false ways in their search for God. These are *people of good will* who find *peace on earth*. God can do what he wants with people whose heart is in the right place.

Church and Authority

The Pope and morality: Vatican I [1870] claimed the Pope to be infallible - cannot make a mistake when, as shepherd and teacher, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the Church.

However, the Church has never proclaimed any *ethical* practice of the Pope to be infallible. Maybe because the only ethical teachings that are infallibly right are so general as to be self-evident: *do to others what you would have them do to you*, for example.

The Pope's moral teaching does have special *authority*, stemming from his position as the sign of unity in the Church. He is in a unique position to say back to the Church what he is hearing what the Spirit is saying to the world-wide Church.

Bishops, in council with the Pope, likewise. Every grouping of Christians has its own *authority*, depending on hearing what the Spirit is saying in the consciences of their people today. The Pope cannot tell me what I think I ought to do. Only God can do that.

The Pope and faith: he is in a unique position to say back to the Church what faith in the Church already is. When Popes in recent times have proclaimed dogmas defined by themselves, they are careful to make thorough enquiry first as to how widespread the belief in question was [*Pius XII and Doctrine of the Assumption - 1950*] how ancient the belief was before giving back to the Church what it already believed.

The Pope could not suddenly expect the Church to believe in a fourth member of the Godhead. *He can only define what the faith of the Church already is*. He cannot tell me what I believe, though by virtue of his position he can say what *we believe*.

The Pope and unity: the role of the successor of Peter is never to replace my conscience. Nor replace my faith, or our faith. His role has to do with conscience and faith *because* of his position as sign of unity. There is only one God; the perfect sign of God is *one person* - Jesus the Christ.

We are Church, not at the expense of the individual, but to cherish individual persons. God is shepherd, Jesus is shepherd, the Pope is shepherd - all of us are shepherd. Likewise with light, Jesus is light... etc. God never sacrifices one for the sake of the many... The world does that, but not God [*neither should we, therefore*].

A body has only one head. A tree has one main trunk. A building one foundation stone. Once we depended on Peter's faith: *But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brethren* - Lk.22.32. Now we depend on one man, who stands as a living reminder of the words of Christ: *as long as you did it to the least of my little*

ones, you did it to me - Mt.25.40. The Pope is *the least of the little ones, the servant of the servants*. If we travel and leave the Pope behind, we have left Jesus behind, the Shepherd, the Light, the Rock.

The function of the Pope has to be something that does not depend on human ability or talents. His main role is simply to *be there - the least of my brethren - where Jesus is*.

How could Jesus be so sure? There is a remarkable confidence in what Jesus says - *as long as you did it to the least...* identifying himself with of everyone born or to be born; *you have heard it said, but I say to you* - Mt.5.17. What was it that made Jesus so sure?

First - he knew his message was from God; he knew he was right to call God Abba, and to invite the rest of us into this. Prophets in OT always appealed to God to justify what they said. Jesus says *but I say to you!*

Second - see Jesus' seed parables in the context of:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Is.55.10-11.

Also 1Peter.25: *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.* The Word by which God calls us his children, and we call him Abba - Jesus the Christ.

Third - At Caesarea Philippi Jesus witnessed God revealing to Peter that the hope of all the ages was contained in the person and message of himself - Jesus of Nazareth: *You are the Christ*. Jesus was able to face what was coming with serenity, because here the seed had already taken root [*in Peter*] in someone other than himself - Mk.8.27-31.

Fourth - Jesus knew that, as yet, his word was not completely spoken. He still had to love his own to the bitter end, so that his disciples would see in him *how God loves his own* to the bitter end. Then Peter would believe the hidden Mystery, as well as believing Jesus to be the Christ. The confidence of the Church about its message, a message which has the same foundation as Jesus' confidence.

Anointing: four Sacraments use anointing - *baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick, orders*. Anointing of the sick regards oil as ointment - as used medically and by athletes. For the remaining three, the symbolism is *choice* and *royalty*.

In baptism God chooses us as his children, a choice he never regrets. Confirmation God chooses us into intimacy, to be like him. Orders - the seed of God's word doesn't just blow in the winds around the world, but *is sent* with *chosen* sowers. The success of the sowing depends *not* on human qualities, but on God's choice.

Character of three sacraments: Baptism, confirmation and orders are, by their nature, only given once. Baptism gives the candidate the permanent right to the bread for children. Confirmation gives the right to the chalice. Orders gives the candidate the right to preside at the Eucharist of bread and chalice.

Where is Jesus Christ? He is Lord, at the right hand of Abba - i.e. wherever God is to be found, there too is Jesus. Since God may be found wherever we are, so too is Jesus. God is found wherever there is life. Wherever Jesus is found there is God. He tells us to look for him in the poor, the excluded, the sick, those

in prison - Mt.25.31-46; he adds little children - Mk.9.37. However we treat them we do to God.

Vatican II tells us four ways Jesus is present: in the Eucharist - in the person of the minister- in the gathering of *two or three or more*, in the Word spoken [*not just recited as in a formula*], and uniquely in the bread and wine of the sacrament.

In each sacrament there is a minister - not always ordained - but Christ is present just the same. In marriage the ministers are the bride and groom - and remain so until death [*not just a one-off*].

In each sacrament there is a gathering of at least two or three in Christ's name - and the Scriptures are read - Christ is there speaking - as well as a special presence in each sacrament: adopting us: in baptism, calling us; in confirmation; feeding us; in the Eucharist bringing forgiveness through reconciliation; caring for our illness in the anointing; loving us unto death in marriage; *always and everywhere* in orders.

Christ is never *partly* present - never less than total self-giving. Learn from the Eucharist. When we come together to share meals, the food we eat becomes part of us - when we come to share the Eucharist we - so many - become one in the bread we share; so much so that Christ is with us always and we take him everywhere - even to places he would rather not go; but is there because we are there. *Nothing can separate us from this love* - Rom.8.31.

Sadly we have inverted what should be occasions for rejoicing - *Lord, I'm not worthy...* God never asks us to be worthy but longs for us to be willing to receive. So too with *what I have done and what I have failed to do* - God is not interested in my behaviour, but totally fascinated by me - am I open to believe this? If I can accept this *with all my heart*, I will gradually realise that I am *becoming* what I am receiving - *for others*.

Better for you that I go away: as Jesus from Nazareth, he is present to those around him; dying as Jesus, rising as the cosmic Christ, he is universally present - not just with, but within. As long as Jesus was with us in the flesh he is restricted by time and space - *he's in Bethany with Mary, Martha and Lazarus... or in Jericho, or Jerusalem*. Only since the Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit has Jesus become the Christ - with and within everything.

Beloved disciple: *I am the light of the world* - Jn.8.12, becomes *you are the light of the world*- when Jesus send us out, now filled with his Spirit. The Son, in Jesus, puts flesh on how he experiences God. Now the Church sees what the world does not see - the presence of God in Christ, and in turn puts flesh on what it sees:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.
Jn.15.1-17.

We must be loved first, and know it. Then are we able to share what we have received. The gift comes first - Baptism, before he calls us to send us out - Confirmation.

Mary, model of the Church

The name Abba is at the heart of our religion - but we must remember that like any word we use about God, it is metaphor. God is not a human father, is not like a human father. The words *not like* don't apply - God is not like anything or anyone, but we need to speak of God:

You are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah -
Mt.23.8-10.

Every reality has its origin in God, as rays come from the sun. God the Father is not a man, nor male - *which makes every male image for God inadequate.* Scripture also uses *Mother: Will a mother forget her child* - asks Isaiah - 49.14. Jesus compares himself to:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! -
Mt.23.37.

God created us in his own image - male and female he created them - Gen.1.27. There's something of God which is male and not female; there is something of God that is female and not male - *to exclude either is to miss something of God.* Every woman is better equipped than any man to demonstrate the femaleness of God. Mary does not have to work very hard at looking more like a mother than her son ever could.

Model of the Church: which means seeing clearly in one person the characteristics that should be in the community called Church.

Hail, full of Grace - Lk.1.28 - says Gabriel. *Greetings to you who are all gift [you never hear Mary say I'm not worthy].* Nothing of her own, everything is gift, and she knows it. This pin-points how Mary is model for the Church, the community which accepts willingly, being God's children - *full of gift [grace].*

Mary did what the Church is now doing - gives Christ to the world. Physical presence does not always lead to conversion: many people must have met Jesus during his life, and yet were willing to see him condemned. *Mary is what the Church would be* - one who hears the Word of God - *you are my beloved child* - and keeps it, to share with others; giving the world God's Word made flesh - love in action.

Presenting her child in the Temple, treasuring what she sees in her heart, rushing to help Elizabeth, standing to watch God's love at the foot of the cross, waiting for the Spirit with the Apostles - showing us what we [Church] should be doing.

Pruning: Jesus often compares life to the life of plants and trees - we grow through belonging to another. Left to ourselves we grow wild - sour grapes... Abba is the vinedresser who cherishes and so prunes the vine, to produce wholesome fruit.

Nature and Grace: *Natural* is an ambiguous word. A vine left to itself produces sour grapes - so, nature is bad!! A vine pruned by Abba produces wholesome fruit - so nature is good!! We tend to compare nature with Grace, whereas Grace calls forth what is already in by nature. Grace works with nature.

Natural goodness is also grace. So, what is Original Sin? There is nothing wrong with the vine [*my life*]; it is free to give itself to the vine dresser or not; free to let itself be pruned and be fruitful, or remain unattended and produce sour grapes.

Conceived without sin: a doctrine seemingly strange - science can't detect it at conception, so what does the Immaculate Conception mean? As remarked previously, Original Sin is the name we give to those who do not dare to call God *Abba* - that the Father is wide open to welcome every child of Abba - i.e. everyone.

Peace, shalom is one of Christ's names, Isaiah calls the messiah the "Prince of Peace" and St. Paul writes simply, "He is our peace." It was given to Mary even before the angel said, "Hail full of Grace" in the Gospel of Luke.

Mary accepted and gave birth to Jesus, who brings us the gift of peace. That's what we celebrate at Christmas. Today we remember the gift that prepared Mary for this. The gift given to Mary and named when the Angel said *Hail full of Grace*. It is the gift we call the Immaculate Conception, when God blessed her before she was born, when she was conceived in her mother, Anna's, womb.

That gift is the exactly the same gift we receive after we are born, when we are baptized. In the Letter to the Ephesians Paul writes: "*God chose us to be holy and blameless ... to be adopted sons & daughters of our God.*"

She received the eternal Word herself before conceiving and forming his body. The angel did not say - first you will conceive, and then receive the Word... but that the conceiving would happen through the work of Spirit and the indwelling of the Word. Before she conceived in her womb, she already had conceived the Word in her heart.

She wasn't simply asked to give birth to a child - but to allow the Holy Spirit to work God's love for the world through her life. There was a time when she wasn't mother, but there never will be a time when she isn't! She is mother of Jesus-Risen, whose body members we are - she is mother of Christ in the world.

When Duns Scotus commented on Mary, full of Grace... he pointed out that *she always understood that everything and everyone is living proof of God's graciousness*. Her own self, her own reality is gifted through grace - i.e. *God's desire in her to receive love* - i.e. Mother of God.

Jesus and Mary - sinless: Jesus is sinless: *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin* - Heb.4.15. His awareness of God as his Abba, was total - he was totally *beloved of Abba*.

For any baby the mother's love is crucial for growth. Jesus' sinlessness, aware that he was loved totally by God, *becoming conscious of this was prompted* by the love he enjoyed from Mary and Joseph - Mary's love [*grace*], gifted by God, *she never used her freedom to sin.*

The story of the human race before Christ, shows it as a mix of good and bad - in fact as we are today. How did the parenting of Jesus become so perfect that no flaw appeared in him?

Christian tradition holds Mary to be virgin all her life; that Joseph had no part in the conception of her son. This was to preserve the unique relationship between Jesus and Abba. A relationship we too enjoy through baptism:

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it -
Rev.2.17.

Our baptism is so special!

Tradition also holds that what God did for Jesus in the Resurrection, he has done for Mary; with this difference - Jesus' glory is his own, the one and only Son. Mary's, like ours is reflected - if he is like the sun, she is like the moon. We believe in the Resurrection of the body - the Assumption tells us that not just Jesus' body is with God - it's done a good job leading us through life; the Assumption reaffirms the role of our bodies as if saying - *you aint seen nothing yet!*

The Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law -
Gal.5.22.

This is the Spirit of Jesus freely given to anyone willing to receive it - and even anonymously within everyone as the active principle of goodness. The Good News is to believe this - and let it flow into action in the love and respect we show beyond ourselves - irrespective of worthiness: *you received without charge, give without charge* - Mt.10.8. Accepting the Good News [*God loves me unconditionally*] means insecurities gradually diminish the more active I am in believing.

Jesus left his own peace with his disciples - *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid* - Jn.14.27. But how reconcile this with: *I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled* - Lk.12.49?

Truth, brought in Jesus, means the accepted norm in the world, tribal clannishness is out [*birds of a feather...*]. This is powerfully with us today in the attitude to migration. *Members only* will never be of the kingdom. The peace Jesus brings is fundamentally different - rising out of *experiencing* God as Abba.

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life -
Jn.4.14.

What waters the seed of the Word is that God is Abba, and nothing else.

Baptism of desire: not only the sacramentally baptised have the Spirit; wherever the fruit of the Spirit is found, [*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*] there is Abba,

pruning and dressing the vine - non-believers included; God is not confined to the working of his Church.

Such people have a similarity to Mary, John the Baptist etc. able and ready for the Good News, although never actually hearing it. If people who do not belong to the Church behave in ways they see to be good and not prejudicial, and enjoy life as do believers - rejoice and be glad.

We are saved by Faith, faith in the love shown to us. *Good works* are a *thank-you* for such love. The pattern of salvation; which means faith and love are the same for believers and non-believers alike. Hope is in the resurrection, special to Christians.

Because we dare to believe in God's unconditional love for us, and we dare to love others without expecting a return. No doubt God has his own way of reassuring non-believers that love and good will are all that matters.

Faith and seeing: mature faith is virtually the same as seeing - *You believe because you have seen me* - Jn.20.29. When faith reaches the stage of seeing, it does not cease to be free. Jesus was free and was tempted.

What about: *Blessed are those who do not see, yet believe?* The beginnings of faith are steps in the dark. We tend to believe what those who love us say, because we trust [*believe in*] them. Only gradually do we see more of the *secret* of their love, and feel able to reproduce it in our own lives.

Faith grows and matures into love. It's not a question of believing the Apostles' Creed - as the Catechism says! - nor is it agreeing with Church Documents. The place where God reveals to me is my heart, telling me who I can trust. More readily found in the mentally compromised, who are experts in knowing who to trust.

Faith moves mountains: - Mt.7.20. Anxiety makes mountains out of molehills; faith makes molehills out of mountains; all because I can call God Abba. *Mystery* is not something we can know nothing about - it is what we can't know everything about.

The narrow gate: *Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate* - Mt.7.13. Jesus' mission was to bring the Good News about God - *the experience God as Abba*.

Priesthood of Baptism - Priesthood of Orders: In Baptism we become sheep of God's flock, called to be shepherds - the call we receive in Confirmation. Every baptised person is called to share in the royal priesthood of Christ. In Baptism we are given a place at God's table; in Confirmation we receive an invitation to go out and spread the Good News, unique for each one. Ordination invites us to preside over the breaking of bread - saying: *this is my body... this is my blood*. The guarantee is from God, not the ordained minister.

If this Word is to be everywhere the same, there must be one who presides over all, when the whole Church assembles - the successor of Peter. There is only one body, one spirit. If the Word is to be everywhere the same, there must be a succession in commissioning - the office of Bishop; the link between the local Church and the Pope.

The Sacrifice of Christ is sacramentally present through the words of the ordained minister - *This my body... this is my blood*. As it was *when I showed you once and for all how much God loves you* - the Speaker is Christ!

Pain: the way of the cross, through the narrow gate, the way of freely doing without God's fatherly love for me, is a painful way. This is not volunteering for extra troubles from God. Riches perish with death, this is merely detaching from what we will eventually lose any way.

It is not expecting more or less illness or misfortune. God does not distribute health and fortune as rewards for good behaviour, nor does God give sickness and failure as punishments.

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him - Jn.9.1.

In pain and suffering, pray as Jesus did:

Jesus walked on a little way. Then he knelt with his face to the ground and prayed, My Father, if it is possible, don't make me suffer by having me drink from this cup. But do what you want, and not what I want - Mt.26.39.

If my parents could have taken away my pain, they would have done! What about Almighty God? *If it be possible* - if the pain stays - is it because removal is not possible? Abba could not have removed the suffering from Jesus without being complicit in the lie about truth. God cannot remove his reality - God is truth.

The way the Father is all-powerful is the way love is all-powerful - to take us through *the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune* - Hamlet. To be *in the image and likeness* of God is *to be servant*, not just act like one. [*Have I the courage to ask what do people feel when I'm around?*] Only when we have lost everything will we be like God - who is totally self-emptying - not in mortification, but in love.

Penance: Ignatius of Loyola has a strict description: *taking no more than we strictly need*, he says of sleep, comfort, food, drink and clothing is not penance but temperance. Penance is taking what we need, not what we want!

The Sermon on the mount advises that prayer, fasting and almsgiving should be done secretly - Mt.6.1-18. They should also be voluntary. God never demands penance. Repentance, yes; accepting God as *Abba*. Penance has no value unless it is voluntary.

Morality is a *thank-you* to an over-generous father. Penance is to remind us that we should not expect to be treated as lords and masters - being fed and dined. But to make penance an end and not a means to an end - is nonsense. Penance is not to be recommended to children since it runs the risk of seeing a demanding God.

Reward and Punishment: God's love is totally free and universal - heaven is free, not obtained by good deeds. Jesus said: *when you have done all that is commanded - say: we have only done our duty [it's my job]*. Rewards are earned - God's love cannot be earned. As there is no sense in competing with one-another to see who is doing the severest penance; so too there is no sense in competing in doing good works. This is not to deny free will. We freely accept God's love in faith.

Moral education: does this mean fear of punishment and hope for reward have no place? There are stages in moral maturing: *fear and hope; loyalty to tribe/family; respect for law; able to see exceptions to law; seeing morality as a value beyond law*. Life is a progression towards living no longer dependent on law.

In religious terms, this is a process from fear to faith. We start with fear, and need to be weaned from it. This usually happens through hope of rewards, then loyalty to family, on to respect for universal law, with the ability to see exceptions. Until life emerges into freedom, when law can be set aside through wholesome living - [*relatively few seem to reach this*].

Jesus is one who obviously did - see his attitude relating faith and action to Abba, beyond law: *the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath* - Mk.2.28; and yet is the fulfilment of the law: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them* - Mt.5.17.

He is the incarnation of:

This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

Jer.31.33.

This covenant is not confined to Jesus. *Through, with and in him* all can reach fulfilment, since the same Spirit is given to all.

Stewards: *stewards of creation* is by no means novel: *You formed man in your own likeness, and set him over the whole world* - Gen.1.26. But stewardship must never cloud the Good News. God is our Abba. *Reach for the stars, and remember, I will catch you if you fall...*

Poverty, Chastity, Obedience: what is their place? To have no security other than the Providence of Abba.

Chastity is really part of poverty. Non-possessive, non-exclusive love: the desire to love everyone and *possess* no one. Marriage is the sign of the everlasting covenant - a sign only, reality can be found by-passing this sign.

Poverty and Chastity are against ambition and the tendency to live for tomorrow. When all goes well, and these counsels are freely embraced and desired, there is no worry about the past, since all is forgiven, and the heart is free from planning for tomorrow. Where God is, the present moment is where we are too - it is for me to get together with God, through his invitation and the free gift of his own desire for me - his Spirit.

Obedience - is willing to seek Abba's will, in the company of others, *listening [obeying]* to God's Word. It doesn't mean going against my conscience - if I am asked to do something I see to be wrong. It can and does mean doing something I personally see to be less wise.

In fact P C and O applies to all seeking Gospel living: trusting God's love; non-possessive loving, *no conditions apply!*

God the Son

Eternity is not a long stretch of time. Sunshine every day becomes boring. There is no such reality as time in eternity. Timeless cannot mean any before or after. The present moment we enjoy is a better picture of eternal life than an endless past and future. When yesterday was now, God was there - when tomorrow is now - God is there - eternal life means *God is here!*

We started our reflections with Jesus, true man - what it meant to be God's child; something he seems to have known without any teacher.

We do not believe that Jesus from Nazareth was sitting *up there* with the Father and the Spirit, before time; and that Jesus of Nazareth was consulted when the world was being created; that one day, the Father sent him to be born to save us. Yet, we believe Jesus is God the Son made man; the Word incarnate; the second person of the Trinity - and we speak truly when we say *my Lord and my God*.

Pre-existence of Christ: not the pre-existence of Jesus from Nazareth. *Christ* existed in God, the Son existed before Jesus was born. What is more - *we existed in Christ before we were born*. In a sense, though I had a beginning, I didn't have a beginning. God never began to love me - there is no beginning in God! So, who was God loving before I was born? What is the face I had before I was born?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved -
Eph.1.3.

If God had me in mind from the beginning of creation, he certainly had Jesus in mind, as the Christ, in whom we would be saved.

Wisdom of God: in the early Church, before any formulation of the Doctrine of the Trinity, they asked themselves: *how could such a truth be hidden for so many centuries?* The Spirit was fairly easy to find - *The spirit breathed over the waters...* Gen.1.2. The Son was to be found in OT references to God's Wisdom. In later writings Wisdom of God is the purpose by which the universe is directed - where all that went before, and all that came after, makes sense.

Paul says:

but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God... But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption -
1Cor.1.24, 30.

Word of God: a word makes sense of reality. For John, Jesus is the eternal Word of God - Jn.1.1, born of the Father; making sense of our world. The Word doesn't only exist when spoken - anything existing points to its eternal existence in God. A word reflects the mind that speaks it. Jesus is the truth about God, expressed in our flesh - *Abba!*

I am called - means I was sent: everyone has a vocation. God calls every day! I was *called* out of nothing, *called* into the light of day when I was born, *called* into a particular family; *called* me in the gifts I have. There are two sides to the *call*. The other side is *sent*. Sent into the world with a purpose. Jesus is my meaning, I am not his meaning! My life and mission are tied to the meaning and mission of his life.

When did I become child of God? - I was already a child of God before I was baptised - like every child *born of woman*. I know all this only because of Jesus - I was chosen *in Christ* before the foundation of the world - my vocation is to discover the face I had before I was born.

Sharing his divinity: by adoption, not by right. If Christ can say *I and the Father are one* - there is a sense that I can say it too. One with the Father *in*

Christ. Yet we are weak - as Jesus was, and servants like him and his Abba. The *Old Adam* in us wants to be like God - Gen.3.5; the Christ in us wants to become servant - and be like God!

Image of God: Christ in whom we are created is the: *likeness of God* - 2Cor.4.4. A mirror image is *one-with*, but different - back to front! A child is one with parents, but different. Jesus is one with Abba; *Philip, to see me is to see the Father* - Jn.14.9. But Jesus is Son, a child related to the Father. *Sonship* is in God too. The Father is *Abba*. The Son says *Abba* - both are divine. We speak with his Spirit, freely given to us, he does not speak with our spirit.

All things created through him: - Col.1.16. Mankind, the crown of creation; Jesus the crown of humankind - the one in whom we all make sense, through experiencing God as Abba. The Spirit of Christ makes sense of creation.

The Trinity: the doctrine of the Trinity is not just another mystery to be added to all that has been said. Through Jesus, we are *one with God*. Jesus is our doorway - who lives, dies, rises and ascends; and from Abba sends us his Spirit so that we can claim Abba as Father. First comes love - making no demands. Then acceptance of love by the Beloved; where the Spirit is the mutual intimacy of this. We go with God, in God to God. Three Persons, one God - *ABBA!*