

The Texts of the Convivium

THAT IMMENSE FAMILY OF FAMILIES THAT THE ENTIRE HUMANITY IS CALLED TO BEING

Nothing binds a community better than the sense of being a family. In monarchies the king is considered the people's father. The head of a republic is a father figure. The head of the Catholic Church is the pope (a title that sounds the same as "abba", "babbo", Italian for daddy, or "papà"). The consequence of a concept of paternity is also evident.

The pope is acknowledged with a "supremacy", in other words, a universal paternity: not only in Catholicism, but also in circles other than Christianity which have *vita separata* but this doesn't mean one would be unwilling to attribute a "supremacy" to the Pope of Rome, if not of "jurisdiction", then at least of "honour". A long tradition that started way back in the early centuries confirms such a tendency.

Nowadays many men and women of different religions also consider the papacy a reference point; and their governments propose the Holy See to establish diplomatic relations, despite the fact that the presence of Catholics in those countries are a minority, to say the very least.

If the papacy proves capable of accomplishing the role of universal paternity, it could give an immense contribution to the spiritual unity of the world and therefore to its political unity.

In the promotion of ecumenism Christianity could exert an extremely particular role, which a good theologian identifies with the person of Christ. It's not by chance that the centuries of history are counted "before Christ" and "after Christ". Jesus nevertheless remains the principal religious reference figure among even the most different religious traditions.

The birth of Christ in the stables of Bethlehem, the angels, the shepherds, the Three Wise Men and what one narrates, even briefly, about the childhood of the Messiah in the little house in Nazareth, is a beautiful story.

Here the supreme father figure is God Himself, represented in the Sacred Family by Joseph, who is considered the putative father of Jesus. Then there is a maternal figure, Mary, with angelic features given to her by iconography. Just before he died on the cross Jesus entrusted his mother to his favourite disciple John, who symbolises the Church and entire humanity, of which Mary is the mother.

It's also wonderful to re-evolve these events as a family story: like a story that concerns our own origins. And telling the story of these spiritual ancestors of ours that bear the names of Jesus, Joseph and Mary.

In a famous invocation dedicated to the three there is the verse "Jesus, Joseph and Mary, I give you my heart and soul".

When I was eight years old, when my parents separated, I was parked for a few months at the "Santa Maria" College in Rome. I remember that every evening there, before going to bed, my group of little boys met together with the "prefect" in the study room to say the last prayers of the day. Amongst these was the ejaculation that started off with the words "Jesus, Joseph and Mary, I give you my heart and soul". It was a last "remembrance" of the three leading figures of our faith. And also a final greeting, or a "goodnight" before falling asleep in communion with them.

Another memory I still have of those years is the image of my father, who, before going to bed, used to turn to an old bureau where a double leather frame held the photos of his parents, whereas in a simple frame of the same material was a photo of his elder brother who was also deceased. My father used to take the two frames in his hands, first the one of my grandparents and then that of Uncle Cesare, and kiss them.

This was also a remembrance, by my father, of his dearest deceased loved ones. And it was a final greeting or "goodnight" to them at the end of the day.

The sense of establishing a family was in this way revived in our very small community; a cell of that immense family of families that the entire human race is called to being.