

Message for June 12, 2022

Romans 8:12-17

Patria Potestas. This is a Latin phrase and it simply means that the father is all powerful. This phrase certainly describes the role of a father in ancient Roman society. When a child was born for example, he or she was placed at the father's feet. If the father picked the child up, then the child was kept and became a part of the family. If however the father for whatever reason refused to pick the baby up, then the child was either killed or abandoned, to either die or else be claimed by someone and destined to become a slave. Roman fathers never lost their power of life and death over their children either. A man could be forty years old for example with a family of his own but if his father ordered him to do something, anything at all, then he had no choice but to do it. A father's word really was law until the day he died and so, rather obviously, fathers were people to be reckoned with.

The ancient Romans however didn't just emphasize a father's authority, they also emphasized something else too and that was adoption. Adoption was very common amongst the ancient Romans, and it wasn't just infants or young children who were adopted; older children, teenagers, even adults were adopted. Why? Simply because it was a way of cementing a business relationship or a friendship. Given a father's power though, most people thought long and hard before putting their child up for adoption. Once the decision was made though, there were two steps.

The first was a symbolic sale. Three times the natural father offered his child up for sale. The first two times he bought his child back. The third time however he didn't and just walked away. The adopting father then bought the person to be adopted and after that they went to see a judge. The judge was told why the adoption should take place, and if he thought that the reasons were sufficient, he approved it. What this meant was that the new father now had complete power while the old one had none at all. In fact, according to the law, the adopted person's life before the adoption didn't matter and it was as if it had never happened. The adopted person was thought to be a new person with a new name, a new life, and a new family. I don't doubt though that some of you are probably wondering; what is the point of me telling you all this? The reason is that this background information is absolutely crucial if we are to truly

appreciate what Paul wrote in today's scripture passage. Remember who it was addressed to? The Romans!

In today's passage Paul drew a parallel between God the Father on the one hand, and a Roman father on the other. Like a Roman father, God the Father is all powerful. He is not to be argued with or only obeyed if we are in the mood to do so. God's word is law and as the Father, God can do whatever he wishes with us. And who are we to argue? What can we do about it if we don't like what God has done? Cry? Sulk? Complain? There is certainly no higher authority that we can appeal to.

God the Father then is a being that we might, with very good reason, fear and perhaps even dread but, said Paul, we don't have to. In fact Paul, like Jesus before him, said that we can even call God 'Abba', which when translated simply means 'daddy'. We can do this simply because God the Father loves us so much that he even adopted us! Paul even insisted that we are just as much God's children as Christ himself! Granted, we are not divine like Christ and we most certainly are not perfect like Christ but nevertheless, we are still just as much God's children as his very own son! And if that is true, and Paul insisted that it is, then something else follows; Jesus is our brother! Jesus is just as much our brother as our own biological siblings!

Now to Paul, and hopefully to us too, this is tremendous and even mind-boggling news. To think that Christ is our brother and that in the eyes of God we are equal to Christ himself; we are just as precious to God as his very own son! This may well sound too good to be true and may certainly be hard to believe, but Paul insisted that we can believe it simply because God himself has said so! But when were we adopted? When did we become a part of *the* family?

On the day that we were baptized. On that special day, no matter where or when it was, God claimed us forevermore as a part of his family. We may be good, faithful members or we may be straying members but nevertheless we are still a part of *the* family. And while we may take this for granted or even think "so what", it really is an honour to be a part of *the* family. As Paul also reminded those ancient Romans though, where there is privilege there is also responsibility. Just like Christ our brother, we too must dedicate ourselves to living the lives that God would have us do, resisting the temptation to do wrong. Like Christ, we too must strive to love everyone, everywhere, at all times without

exception. This does not of course mean that we must always agree with everyone. Nor does this mean that we must always approve of what someone does. What this does mean however is that we will always strive to exercise respect and consideration, trying our best to be kind and compassionate. Certainly, being a part of *the* family doesn't give us a right to treat others any way we please.

It was after a very contentious church meeting during which a lot of hurtful things had been said with a great deal of anger that one man bitterly said, "The church always brags that we treat everyone like family but by golly, that has to stop!" What he meant by this of course is that all too often it is our families who see us at our worse while complete strangers see us at our best. It is ironical but true that sometimes we will treat the members of our families in a way that we would never treat outsiders. When it comes to the other members of God's family, we should treat them with the same respect and consideration that we would show to our big brother, Christ himself. If we wouldn't say it to Jesus, then we have no business saying it to anyone else. If we wouldn't do it to Jesus, then we shouldn't do it to anyone else. And yet, while it is our families who sometimes see us at our worse, it is also our families who can see us at our best. Consider this true story.

The man had driven into town to pick up a new tool and his two children, Helen who was eight and Brandon who was five, were with him. When they arrived at the mall, they saw that a large temporary petting zoo had been set up in the parking lot. Both of the kids loved animals and eagerly asked if they could go and see the animals. Figuring that both he and they would be happier if they weren't trailing behind him as he looked at the tools, the father gave them each a quarter and off they went. A short while later though the father was surprised to see Helen standing there beside him. He knew that she loved animals and he asked her why she wasn't in the petting zoo with her brother. Her reply was to say that it cost 50 cents to get in and so she had given him her quarter so that he could go in. And then the girl said the most beautiful thing that her father had ever heard her say: "Love is action". After saying that she made it clear that she didn't expect her father to give her 50 cents so that she could go and join her brother. Giving her brother the quarter was her gift of love to him. When the father was asked later why he didn't just give his daughter 50 cents, he said that

he wanted to honour her choice; that sometimes love does mean sacrifice and comes with a price.

Indeed, we should never forget that it was Christ himself who paid the price so that we might be members of the greatest family of all ... the family of God with all of its privileges and responsibilities.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, hear us as we come to you in prayer this late spring morning. We give you thanks for this season of beauty and goodness, and that we are here as a part of your creation.

We thank you that in a world where so many people are hungry, we are not. We thank you that in a world where so many people lack even the most basic medical care, we do not. We thank you that in a world where so many people lack even the most basic of freedoms, we do not. We thank you that in a world where so many people live with strife and violence, we do not.

We give you thanks for our loved ones and our families, praying for their well-being. We give you thanks too, not just for our biological families but also for our spiritual one. We thank you that we can even call you Abba when we pray, simply because you are like a loving father. We thank you that you have, as Paul said, adopted us and claimed us forevermore as your beloved children. We realize that nothing in ourselves makes us worthy of this and that all we can do is thank you and do our best to follow the teaching and example of Jesus, your son who is also our brother.

We pray for the well-being and ministry of your family, your church here on earth. We pray for all who are hurting this day; those who hunger not just for food but also for justice and respect. We pray for all who are ill; not just physically but spiritually. We pray for all those who are weighed down by grief and regret; grant that they may find peace.

We pray for peace in Ukraine and for all those coping with the effects of that devastating conflict; those who have fled or lost their homes, and those who have lost so much more. We pray for all at risk because of the threat to the

world's grain supply. We pray too this day for all those struggling to get by and make ends meet as both inflation and interest rates continue to rise. Grant wisdom we pray, to those in positions of authority that they may know best what ought to be done.

We ask these things in your Son's name. Amen