

## THE NEW LIFE OF A FATHER

Reflection by Eli Owen

What I hope for, as a father, is the new life of children. Right now, I have a 1.5-year-old son, Francis. He is almost three feet tall, has bleach-blond hair, is super energetic, and has his mom's smile. I LOVE that little guy! And not only that, my wife and I are expecting another child this coming June. There is hardly anything in this world that I love more than my children.

Now, how is such a love relevant to all of us today? We are all little, dependent children of God. I will illustrate this with a personal story and then move on to Scripture.

Almost exactly one year ago, I was on a retreat about "The Father's Merciful Love" with my wife and six-month-old son in Denver. As is the case with many new parents, we were sleep-deprived and stressed. Francis would not sleep for more than three hours at a time, and now he was teething, so sleeping less and crying more. And we were supposed to be on a *retreat!*

At one point, I realized that my wife could not take it anymore. She had reached her breaking point. So, I took our child outside and walked around the block, carrying this crying child in my arms. After a while, his crying waned, and he dropped his head upon my shoulder. He was quiet... Then he suddenly lifted his head again and started crying even more. There was nothing I could do but hold him, right there. Then, before I knew it, he collapsed and fell asleep in my arms. My suffering child, Francis, found peace, found rest, in my arms. Almost nothing fills my heart with more love than that.

We are all that little, suffering child. We learn this from Jesus in all the Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must become like little children (*Mt 18:3*). In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing the pain he will suffer, he cries out, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you..." (*Mk 14:36*). In the Gospel of Luke, in some of Jesus' famous last words, he cries out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," and he breathes his last (*Lk 23:46*). And we know the Father is there, for in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (*Jn 14:9*). Now, let this sink in a little more. This is a 33-year-old man, far more mature than any of us, and he cries out to his "Abba," his "Daddy," when he cannot take the pain and suffering anymore. He knew he could trust his Father, that he would make everything better.

Paul, whom we heard from in today's reading (*Rom 8:12-17*) on this wonderful commemoration of the Conversion of St. Paul, is keenly aware of this dynamic. He tells us that we, too, are the children of God who cry out "Abba! Father!" And this is not at any time, but especially when we suffer. He says, "provided that we suffer with Christ, in order that we may also be glorified with Christ." We are all God's little, suffering children.

How many of us have Jesus' childlike trust? We are all suffering during the present pandemic, whether in isolation, loneliness, or fear, and it seems like there is only so much we can do about it. At the very least, I ask you to please reach out to friends, family, myself, Father Chris at St. Teresa's, Pastor Jim and Pastor Kate here, or others, if you feel like you need someone who can give you peace and comfort. And most importantly, PLEASE, please cry out to God the Father in prayer with your pains, your struggles, and your sufferings. He is waiting there for you. He is the God who gives new life to His children.

Blessed be God!