

Homily based on the readings from August 22, 2026 (Ezekiel 43.1-7ab;
Matthew 23.1-12)

“Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven.”

When I was growing up, I frequently heard people from various Protestant denominations using this passage to criticize Catholicism. In particular, they claimed that Christ was prohibiting his followers from referring to members of the clergy as “Father” – which, of course, is something Catholics do on a daily basis. This interpretation not only contradicts 2000 years of Church history, but it entirely misses the point of what Jesus was actually saying.

There are three titles that Christ specifically mentions in this reading: *teacher* (which is the same word as *rabbi*), *father*, and *master*. He tells us plainly that we have only one teacher, only one father, and only one master. Nevertheless, we use the word *teacher* all the time to describe the courageous men and women who are entrusted with educating our children. Likewise, we all use the word *father* – and similar words like

dad – to refer to our male parents. Although the word *master* is somewhat outdated, we still employ similar expressions such as *employer, manager, and supervisor*. If we did not use these terms, we would have to invent new ones – because these human relationships will always exist within our society.

So what is Jesus actually saying here? He is definitely *not* telling us that our fathers are not really our fathers. Instead, he is making the point that all fathers – throughout human history – have been copies, replicas of our one *true* father. If we think back to every time our earthly fathers demonstrated love or patience or kindness or wisdom, they were embodying the original fatherhood of God. Conversely, whenever a father falters in his responsibilities, he is displaying the degree to which he is an imperfect reproduction.

Today, of course, is also the Memorial of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary – a feast established by Pope Pius XII in 1954 and moved to its current date, a week after the Solemnity of the Assumption, by

Pope Saint Paul VI in 1969. Although Mary's motherhood is different from God's Fatherhood, it is no less eternal in scope. To quote Saint Bernard, whose memorial we celebrated this past Thursday: "she was chosen from eternity, foreknown and prepared by the Most High for himself, guarded by the angels, prefigured by the patriarchs, and promised by the prophets." Mary's motherhood culminated at the moment when our Lord, dying on the Cross, entrusted his Blessed Mother and his Beloved Disciple to each other's care: "Woman, behold, your son!" – "Behold, your mother!" This relationship carries through to every member of the Church. To quote Pope Saint John Paul II:

Mary is present in the Church as the Mother of Christ, and at the same time as that Mother whom Christ, in the mystery of the Redemption, gave to humanity in the person of the Apostle John. Thus, in her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one in the Church, and embraces each and every one through the Church. (*Redemptoris Mater* 47)

Mary's relationship with Christ is unparalleled, but she longs to share this relationship *personally* with each of us. Our connection with the Blessed Mother is not only expressed through reverence to sacred images and statues – through pious litanies and prayers – but through the primal love between a mother and her child. By the grace of God, the very arms that cradled *him* as a baby have been taken up into heaven. Those same arms are now beckoning *all* her children to follow her example, to join with her in the loving embrace of Jesus Christ.