



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Accounts](#) - October 16, 1931, in a Madrid streetcar: Abba, Pater!

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John F. Coverdale

I learned to call God “Father” as a child in the Our Father. But to feel, to see, to admire God’s desire that we be his children..., that was on the street, in a streetcar, for an hour or an hour and a half, I’m not sure. “Abba, Pater!” I had to shout.

One day, toward the end of September 1931, Escrivá experienced an overwhelming sense of the reality of God’s fatherhood and of his own sonship. During a long period of prayer of union and thanksgiving, he contemplated these joyful realities. He described the experience briefly, but in sufficient detail to give some idea of its content: “I considered God’s goodness toward me. Full of interior joy, I would have shouted on the street, ‘Father! Father! so that everyone might know my filial gratitude. Although not shouting, I walked about calling him softly, ‘Father!’ with the certainty that it was pleasing to him.”

October 16 *Abba, Pater!*

A few weeks later, on October 16, 1931, he experienced an even more intense and prolonged sense of being a son of God. Once again, this period of sublime prayer (which he later described as the most elevated prayer God ever gave him) occurred not in church but on the street. He had spent some time in church trying without success to pray. After leaving the church on a bright fall morning, he bought a newspaper and took the streetcar. There he was invaded by “prayer of copious, ardent affections,” lost in contemplation of “this marvellous reality: God is my father.” **[I] felt our Lord’s action, bringing to my heart and my lips, with irresistible force, the tender invocation “Abba! Pater!” (1) I was on the street, in a streetcar... I probably made that prayer out loud. I wandered through the streets of Madrid for an hour, or perhaps two. I can’t say. I didn’t feel time go by. People must have taken me for a madman. I was contemplating, with lights that were not my own, this astounding truth that would remain in my soul like a burning coal and never go out.**

You are Christ

Looking back on this experience years later, Escrivá saw an intimate connection between the suffering he had been undergoing and the sense of being a son of God. **When God sent me those blows back in 1931, I didn't understand them... Then all at once, in the midst of such great bitterness, came the words: "You are my son (Ps 2:7), you are Christ." And I could only stammer: "Abba, Pater! Abba, Pater! Abba! Abba! Abba!"** Now I see it with new light, like a new discovery, just as one sees, after years have passed, the hand of God, of divine Wisdom, of the All-Powerful. You've led me, Lord, to understand that to find the Cross is to find happiness, joy. And I see the reason with greater clarity than ever: to find the Cross is to identify oneself with Christ, to be Christ, and therefore to be a son of God.

Escrivá understood that this experience was not meant to be merely personal. Rather, it signified that the sense of being sons and daughters of God was to be a fundamental characteristic of Opus Dei's spirit. He begged God to preserve it in the members of Opus Dei. On one occasion he prayed: **Lord, I ask your Mother, St Joseph our Patron, and my ministerial Archangel, always to preserve this spirit for me and my children. *Ne respicias peccata mea, sed fidem***[Do not regard my sins, but my faith]. May this faith, this love for the Cross be ours till death! This divine light leads us always to understand clearly that it's worthwhile letting ourselves be nailed to the Cross, since it means entering into Life, immersing ourselves in the Life of Christ. The Cross: it is there you find Christ, and you have to lose yourself in him! Then there will be no more sorrow, no more suffering. You mustn't say: "Lord, I can't do any more, for I'm so wretched..." No! It's not true! On the Cross, you will be Christ, and you will sense that you are a son of God. And you will exclaim, "**Abba! Pater! What happiness to find you, Lord!**"

The fatherhood of God is, of course, a truth revealed by Christ in the Gospel and forms an important part of Christian doctrine. As such it had been present in the spirit of Opus Dei from the very beginning. Now, however, it took on a new importance in Escrivá's own life and in that of the members of the Work. In 1969, Escrivá explained: **I could tell you exactly the when and the where, down to the moment and the place, of that first prayer of a child of God. I learned to call God "Father" as a child in the Our Father. But to feel, to see, to admire God's desire that we be his children..., that was on the street, in a streetcar, for an hour or an hour and a half, I'm not sure. "Abba, Pater!"** I had to shout. There are some marvellous words in the Gospel (all the words of the

Gospel are marvellous): “No one knows the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal him” (Mat 11:27). That day, that day he willed in an explicit, clear, categorical way that, together with me, you would always feel that you are children of God, of this Father who is in heaven and who will give us what we ask him in his Son’s name.

(1) “Father!” in Hebrew and Latin. *Abba* is a familiar, affectionate term used by Jewish children to address their fathers. Christ used it in the prayer in the Garden (Mk 14:36), and St Paul used it to describe how Christians, inspired by the Holy Spirit, address God (Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6).

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