

FAITH CHAT

with James & John

Should We Call Our Priests 'Father'?

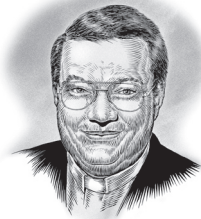
Know This...

Some fathers and mothers let their children call them by their first name. Likewise, some Catholics no longer call priests 'Father.' Both situations are inappropriate. We shouldn't treat our parents and priests only as friends. Our parents gave us life. They are more than our friends. They are our guardians, nurturers, and teachers. We should acknowledge them as our parents. God calls priests to nurture our spiritual lives. Priests are more than our friends. They are our spiritual fathers who help us deepen our love for God. We should always and everywhere call priests 'Father.'



John: Many Christians use Jesus' words in the Bible "call no man your father on earth" to condemn Catholics who call priests 'Father.' They are taking Mt 23:9 out of context. Jesus is chastising the scribes and Pharisees because they elevate their authority beyond what is appropriate.

James: These men used their positions for their own profit and glory when in reality their authority comes solely from our Father in heaven to Whom we owe our existence. Jesus is warning against anyone assuming His Father's role as the source of all knowledge, wisdom, and authority.



John: If we take Jesus too literally, we can't call any man 'father.' Yet, the Holy Spirit-inspired Bible often refers to men as 'father.' Fathers share in the Fatherhood of God.

James: Just as we shouldn't let familiarity with our parents keep us from calling them father and mother, we shouldn't let familiarity with our priests keep us from calling them Father.

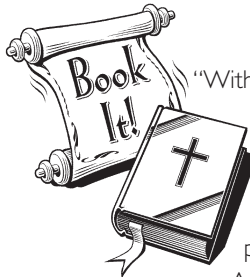
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Jesus chastised the scribes and the Pharisees, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Whoever curses father or mother shall die.' Mk 7:9-10 Jesus said to the crowds and his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice... They do all their deeds to be seen by men... They love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues... And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven... Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Mt 23:2-3, 5a, 6, 9, 12

"The divine Fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood; this is the foundation of the honor owed to parents. The respect of children, whether minors or adults, for their father and mother is nourished by the natural affection born of the bond uniting them. It is required by God's commandment." CCC 2214 "Obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation of the children; not so respect, which is always owed to them." CCC 2217 "For when any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter his father." St. Irenaeus, 180 A.D. "Remember that you are fathers; if you forget Him who is from the beginning, you will have lost your paternity." St. Augustine, 416 A.D.



"With all your heart honor your father; and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you? With all your soul fear the Lord, and honor his priests." Sir 7:27-29 "I was a father to the poor." Job 29:16a The Apostle Paul says he is our spiritual father: "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." 1 Cor 4:15 "As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory." 1 Thes 2:11-12 The Apostle John calls Church leaders 'fathers.' "I write to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning." 1 Jn 2:14a

Heavenly Father, You are the source of all fatherhood. Every father and priest participates and shares in your Fatherhood. I pray that every Catholic will honor Your priests with the title 'Father,' for You called them to be the spiritual fathers who lead us to Your Son and to everlasting life. I ask this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

