

Can I Call You My Dad?

Every so often when I talk to folks about Father Duenas, I quickly find that they have problems with the Catholic Church. I find this out through the immediate statement that “Jesus tells Christians to call no man father. You Catholics must not be Christian.”

My response usually begins with “Really? And all this time I thought I was a follower of Christ! I guess I should rethink things. Can you show me in the Bible where it says that?” Surprisingly, most folks are not able to find the Scripture quote. They just “know it’s in there somewhere. Pastor BillyJoeJimBob told me at Bible study.”

I like to be helpful guy, especially when it comes to finding Scripture quotes, so I will pull out a Bible and open it to the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Chapter 23 verse 9. Here we find Jesus instructing the Apostles that they are to: “*Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven.*”

Well, there you have it. I guess that proves the Catholic Church is the Whore of Babylon mentioned in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 17. Or does it? This is an example of an attempted “proof text”, or quote from Scripture that supports a doctrinal position. While it may seem to be showing that we can’t call Father Duenas, or even our own dads for that matter, “father”, the real attempted proof is that the Catholic Church is just plain wrong.

So, is the Church wrong? Should we call priests “Father”? Perhaps Saint Paul can help us here. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he says:

“I am writing you this not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me.” (1Cor 4:14-16)

Be imitators of him? But he calls himself Father Paul! In fact, he goes on in verse 17 to say:

“For this reason I am sending you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord; he will remind you of my ways in Christ, just as I teach them everywhere in every church.” (1Cor 4:17)

His son? Is this just Saint Paul being difficult to understand? Well, he refers to Saints Timothy and Titus as his true children (1Tim 1:2 and Titus 1:4) and even refers to one individual as “*my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment.*” (Philemon 10). Seems pretty clear he is referring to himself as a father.

In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 7:2), Saint Luke tells us that Saint Stephen refers to his “*brothers and fathers*” in his last moments on earth prior to his martyrdom. Remember, Jesus’ words are understood by some folks as meaning we should not call any person on earth our father. What is the punishment for these terrible public sinners Paul and Stephen?

Their punishments were great indeed, but only at the hands of evil men.

Saint Stephen was granted a vision of heaven immediately before being stoned to death and Saint Paul is, well, Saint Paul! Hardly a bunch of Jesus haters. How could they have so terribly misunderstood Jesus?

Let's look at the possibility that maybe Saint Stephen and Saint Paul did not misunderstand Jesus. How then do we interpret Jesus' words? If we read the verses immediately before and immediately after the verse in question, we can get an idea of what Jesus was talking about.

“The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. ... All their works are performed to be seen. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor at synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation, ‘Rabbi’. You have but one teacher and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called ‘Master’; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant.

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Mt 23:2-12)

We see by putting everything in context that Jesus is condemning seeking the praise of men and claiming authority where there is none. To understand Jesus' words as condemning calling people father who are in fact “fathers” is to do violence to the Scriptures.

Saint Paul tells us to “remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it.”(2 Tim 3:14) Father Duenas' faith and teaching come from none other than Jesus Christ. And Pastor BillyJoeJimBob's teaching?

Perhaps we should be imitators of Saint Paul as he urges us and call priests “Father”. And I plan to keep calling my dad, “Dad”.

“Call No Man Father”

The Biblical Foundations
for Calling Catholic Priests
“Father”

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