

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” How exciting it is to take a newborn home from the hospital. Despite the added responsibility that comes with having a new mouth to feed, and the exhaustion, there is joy and hope. Which parent does he look like? What will he like to eat when he grows up? Which hobbies will he gravitate toward? Will he play nicely with his siblings?

No matter what culture you were raised in, family is important. It is the building block of society. It forms who we are and how we act. It gives us identity and tells us whose we are. The person you are today largely has to do with your family of origin and how you were raised.

But on this All Saints' Day, John in his epistle shows us another kind of family. God's family, where God is our Father, Jesus is our brother, and the Church guided by the Holy Spirit is our mother. Even more than our families of origin, God calls Christians to identify with this heavenly family. **GOD'S CHILDREN FIND THEIR IDENTITY IN THEIR FATHER WHO LOVES THEM.**

First, I. The Father's love moves Him adopt us as His children. Again, John tells us, **“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.”** And he adds, **“Beloved, we are God's children now.”** This familial language appears all over John's writings. He writes elsewhere, **“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”** Church tradition holds that John when he was too old to walk and needed to be carried around, would go around preaching in churches with a one line sermon, **“Little children, love one another!”**

And it comes as no surprise. John records this in his Gospel: **“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** John emphasizes this teaching of Jesus that you must be born again. Not by crawling into your mother's womb, not by anything you do, but by what our Heavenly Father does in you.

God becomes our Father through baptism. It is through this adoption ceremony that He becomes our Father and we become His children. **““God loved the world in this way: that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** Baptism ties us with Christ, so that when God sees us, He sees His perfect Son.

The Father's love moved Him to adopt us as His children. It cost Him the life of His Son as Jesus suffered, died, and was buried for us. Yet because of Jesus' work, being baptized into God's family means that everything that is His is ours. His holiness, His perfection, even His resurrection is now ours. Even as Christ suffered death, as we one day will die, we will experience His resurrection on the day He returns.

Being part of this family, we have a lot to be thankful for. Because Christ, your brother, has identified with you by taking on human flesh, you can identify with him. You are being formed into the image of Jesus. You are part of God's family and you are a beloved, precious, and holy child of God. First and foremost, that is who you are.

Yet II. We become strangers to ourselves when we forget our Father. John continues in our epistle, "**The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.**" In this world, many often don't understand that we belong to our Heavenly Father. Increasingly, we're living in a culture that has no idea of what a family is like let alone a Heavenly family.

We as a culture have become strangers to ourselves. Don't say to me, "You don't know me," because my response is, "You don't know yourself." We have become unmoored from any sense of identity, and we have become like ships lost at sea, grasping at anything to anchor our boats to, even if it is wreckage from another sunken ship that damages our hulls.

And so we live in a world where we define ourselves by our gender identity: we determine who we are based on whether we consider ourselves masculine, feminine, or something in the between. We define ourselves by our sexual identity: who we are attracted to. We define ourselves by our ethnic identity: I'm proud that my ancestors are from this part of the world. We define ourselves by our racial identity which can lead to racism and racial supremacy.

We define ourselves by our vocational identity: I do this job from 9 to 5 during the week, and that makes me who I am. With the election just days away, we have a political identity. It's red versus blue, and we think there's no room for nuance. We demonize our political opponents. We even have a pandemic identity: I value myself and others based on how seriously or how lackadaisical I take COVID precautions. I could keep going on with examples like this.

"The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him." Any attempt to find your identity that does not first start with your identity as a baptized child of God will leave you disappointed. Any attempt to anchor your identity in your gender, sexual preference, race, ethnicity, occupation, political leaning, or pandemic practices will make you a stranger to yourself as those things gradually re-form you in their image.

Paul writes, "**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" You have been baptized into Christ. You are a child of God remade in Jesus' image.

This doesn't mean you're no longer male or female, German or Scandinavian, white or black, Democrat or Republican. It's not as though these things are erased, but they no longer are the primary thing that define you as a

human being. First of all, your name is Christian, and everything else flows out from that. Everything else is secondary to you being children of the Heavenly Father who Christ your brother died to rescue, redeem, and restore and who the Holy Spirit has welcomed in and gathered through His Church.

Why run to Paul when John himself says the same thing. **“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”** III. Christ, our brother, shows us who we are and whose we are.

You right now are being formed into Christ’s image, and even as you hope in Him you become more like Him. This is not our personality being subsumed into the divine like a drop of lemon juice being lost in the ocean. This isn’t “resistance is futile, you will be assimilated.” Rather, only in this Holy family of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do you truly know yourself. Baptized into Jesus Christ, you become more fully you. You are no longer defined by your sinful desires, fears, and addictions. Forgiven and washed clean, you are defined by the Father’s love for you, and there’s ample room for the true you in His kingdom.

On this All Saint’s Day, this formation process that is started in your Baptism is completed on the day you die. That is when you see Jesus face to face. That is when you are truly and fully like him. As much as we miss those dearly departed who have gone before us this past year: Harold, Don, and Lois, we can be confident that they are in Jesus’ presence, no longer sad or suffering, reformed and restored in Christ’s image, even as they await the resurrection of their bodies.

That’s why every funeral sermon is a baptismal sermon. That’s why I act like a private investigator as it regards tracking down baptismal dates and locations. On your deathbed, I want your pastor to be there. If you’re loopy from painkillers, or you’re not totally there mentally, I want to be able to say to you without any question or doubt: on this date in this place, you were baptized into Christ. You were washed in this cleansing flood and you were adopted into God’s family. That is who you are and whose you are. You are a child of your heavenly Father, and nothing can change that.

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!””

On that day, it’s not going to matter whether you are a boy or a girl, whether you liked to sew and cook or fix cars and hunt. It won’t matter who you were attracted to. You won’t be sorted by your nationality or skin color. God’s grace applies to janitors and CEOs, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. You

don't get to go to a special echelon of heaven based on your response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To be certain, God calls us in this life to lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do and husband and wife honor and love each other. To be certain, no matter your job, God wants you to use your talents to the best of your ability to serve others. To be certain, God wants us to vote for candidates that promote ethical and wise policies. To be certain, God wants us to act in this pandemic in ways that preserve the health of ourselves and others. It's not as though these things don't matter whatsoever.

Yet the bottom line is this: the Father calls everyone to turn from sin and be conformed to the image of His perfect Son in Holy Baptism. Baptized into God's family is where your Father claims you, forms you in this life, and perfects you on the day you see Jesus face to face. May we cast all these other adjectives and titles aside and consider ourselves first and foremost "Christian." Amen!