

All Saints Observed / November 6, 2022

1 John 3:1

“See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

St. John begins our text exclaiming, *“Look at the love the Father has given us, that we should be called His children, and that is what we are!”* It’s not a little thing. It’s a big deal! It’s not something we deserve or are in any way entitled to be. It is the gift of God. It is a gift of God’s infinite and incomprehensible love. It is a gift God purchased at the cost of the life of His eternally begotten Son, Jesus Christ. It is a gift given in love and received by faith. It is a gift to be held in our hearts as our most precious treasure. It is the most enduring treasure. Because while our earthly family relations end with death, our family relationship with God in Christ endures forever. In fact, our family relationship with God will be enhanced, as through death He will draw us more fully into His presence. Faith will pass into sight as we await the fullness of relationship with Him and with all the children of God, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today we observe the Feast of All Saints. All Saints is time to consider our family relationship with God, with each other, with believers throughout the earth and with our sisters and brothers in heaven. It is a time to consider what it means to be members of God’s family. What is our connection to God as Father, to the church on earth and to our sisters and brothers in heaven? The answer is Jesus. Our connection to God as Father, to one another, to believers throughout the earth and in heaven is Jesus. Through Him we receive adoption as children of God; in time through faith, fully in eternity in His resurrection to life everlasting. On All Saints we consider the love the Father has given to us that we should be called His children for the sake of Christ our Brother and Saviour.

We become children of a human family through conception and physical birth. We become children of God’s family by divine adoption. We receive adoption through faith, created by the word and working of the Holy Spirit. God seals our adoption in the washing of baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. The first birth is of flesh and blood. The second birth is by water and the Holy Spirit. The first birth is a natural birth into this world, broken by sin and separated from the fullness of relationship with God. All people are children of God in a physical sense, through His act of creation and continued action of procreation. However, we are conceived and born into a broken relationship with God. We are by nature hostile to Him in action and attitude. We are born spiritual orphans, without God, separated from the fullness of life, under the condemnation of physical and spiritual death. Our adoption is a supernatural birth into the family of God. We become children of God in the fullest sense, when the Holy Spirit working through the word and washing of baptism, gives us rebirth through faith in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord.

We are born in time as disobedient children in bondage to sin, under the control of the devil and the condemnation of death. We are reborn as beloved children for the sake of Christ. He is God’s Son, begotten from eternity. Through His perfect obedience and sacrificial death, He atoned for human sin. We are children of God through faith in Christ and the sacrifice of His cross. God reaches out to all His estranged children in Christ. In Christ, God no longer sees human beings in anger because of our sin. Now, because of the sacrifice of Christ, He sees humans as lost sheep, whom He seeks to gather to Himself through the gospel and reconcile through faith in Jesus as Saviour. God wants all people to become His family members through faith in Jesus. All who receive Him through faith are reborn by His power and are called children of God.

We become children of God, because of the reconciliation effected by Jesus, through the blood He shed on the cross. God reconciled us to Himself and atoned for our sins, not because of any goodness in the human spirit, any human sacrifice for sin, or any good things humans do. He atoned for human sin out of love, through the sacrifice He made in giving Christ into death of the cross. What kind of love does the Father have for us? This is the love the Father has for us: When we were dead in sin and His enemies in action and attitude, He gave His only Son to pay the debt of human sin. That’s more than amazing! When John says *“See what kind of love the Father has for us”* he doesn’t mean ‘look,’ he means ‘Wow!’

What kind of love does the Father have for us? Consider what we do for our enemies! What do we do for our enemies? Consider what we do for people who hate us and are hostile to us in every way possible? What do we do to people who hate us? This is what God did: He loved human beings so much when we were dead in sins, alienated from Him through transgressions, rebellious to Him in attitude and action, He gave His beloved Son to die for us. In the letter to the Romans St. Paul writes: *“God demonstrates His own love in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us.”* There is no love like the Father’s love.

But there's more to the Father's love. Not only does the Father give Jesus to live and to die for us, the Father opens our hearts to receive Jesus through faith in His name. We believe not by the power of our reason or the strength of our resolve. We believe by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through the word, the washing of baptism and the nourishment of holy communion. Think about it! God gives the gift by which we receive the gift of adoption into His family in Christ Jesus. How great is the Father's love for us? He gives even the gift of faith that we might believe and receive the gifts of second birth into His family, forgiveness, and eternal life in Jesus.

See what love the Father has for us! First, He gave Jesus to die for us. Then, He opens our hearts to receive Christ as Saviour through the hearing of the word and the washing of Holy Baptism. But that's not all. The Father continues to open our hearts through His Spirit, so our faith would be nourished, strengthened in life and sustained through death, so He may bring us into His presence to await the fullness of our family relationship, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Behold what love the Father has for us that we should be joined to His family in Christ Jesus and called children of God!

What does it mean to be children of God? First and foremost, it means to be forgiven. Forgiveness begins with the acknowledgement of our sins. John begins this letter saying, *"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* To be children of God is to receive His forgiveness. John writes, *"But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* To be children of God is to receive His forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus. St. John concludes saying, *"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins."* As children of God, we have Christ to give us courage in our fears, strength in our trials and confidence in the face of death. God gives His children real and living hope in death through the resurrection of Christ. All who die in Christ rest in Christ. All who rest in Christ will rise with Christ.

To be children of God is to have the promise of sharing Christ's glory. When He appears in glory, we will be made like Him, body and spirit. Our mortal bodies will be fashioned like His immortal body and no longer be subject to death, injury, illness, aging, and any other effect of sin. Our spirits will be purified, so that not a trace or taint of sin will remain. We will see Him as He is. We will share in the fullness of relationship with Him, with each other and all the family of God in Christ Jesus. On that day we will be children of the heavenly Father in the fullest sense. On that great day we will truly see the greatness of the Father's love for us!

God in His mercy, keep us to that day. Amen