

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 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.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

There are certain days in our lives that truly seem to shape or determine who we are. At the very least, some days say something about us. Obviously, the day of our birth is one such day. Maybe you will think of the day you started school, and suddenly you had an interest in a particular field of study. Maybe it was the day you flew in an airplane, and decided you wanted to be a pilot. Maybe it was the day you saw a calf being born on a farm, and decided you wanted to be a vet, or the day you went to the symphony and decided you wanted to be a musician.

There are many days that define us. When we graduate, we have a degree that says something about us. When we get married, we suddenly become a husband or a wife. When our children are born, we become a parent.

For you, our catechumens, this day is one of those days that shapes your life. It says something about you. Today you will make your confession of faith in the presence of God and this congregation. You will declare your desire and intent to live as a child of God and as part of His worshipping people. You will speak of your desire to continue growing in faith as you read, mark, learn and take to heart His Word and share in His Supper. And we will see you in a new light. You will come to join us at the table of the Lord as you partake of His body and blood in Holy Communion. You will move into new areas of service and life in the congregation.

And yet, there are some things that don't change because of this day. Yes, we may start to refer to you as communicant members of the congregation, but you already hold the highest position in God's church. You are a child of God. You, who were once lost, outcast, and enemies of God have been given new life, new birth as His precious, beloved children. God calls us as His own dear children in the waters of our Baptism. He marks us as His own and puts His name on us. He washes away our sin and brings us from death to life through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has given us new life in a family that includes not only the members of this church, but it includes all the saints—both those who live in this world, and those who now live with Him in the glory of heaven. That's who you are, my dear confirmands. That is who we all are by faith! We are the children of God, loved by our Father and precious to Him.

All Saints' Day is an occasion to remember and celebrate that we believers in Christ are members of a very special family. John gets right into that in the words of our text today: *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”* Waiting to board a plane, on which he had a reservation, Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. overheard the piteous plea of a private at the ticket window: “I'm going overseas in three days. I want to see my Ma before I go. I can go home and back only if I travel by plane!” It was explained to him that every seat on the plane was taken. Just then, Brigadier General Roosevelt stepped forward and said, “I'll surrender my seat to him!” “But,” protested a fellow officer to the general, “this is a matter of rank!” “That's right,” General Roosevelt quickly replied, “he's a son, I'm only a general!” God conferred the highest honour upon us when He makes us His sons and daughters!

We are God's children, because God has brought us into His family. We weren't born that way, nor do we have the right to claim a place in His family. Yes, God has created each and every one of us. We are unique, because our Creator has fashioned each of us as He will. But there is a reality that we have inherited from our parents, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. Sin has changed everything. It separates us from God. Our sinfulness has destroyed the father-child relationship we were meant to have with God. As sinners we are outside of God's family, orphans without hope or promise. But as John says, *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.* The Father's love for us is so great that He gave His own Son to bring us back into His family. Jesus set aside all His rights of Sonship in order to save us. He was even willing to be forsaken of His Father when He took all our sin and guilt upon Himself and died for us on the cross. By dying for us and by rising again from the dead, Jesus has brought us forgiveness and the right of adoption as God's children. He has

made it possible for you and me to call God our Father.

That is true for you, my dear Confirmands. It is true for each and every person sitting here this morning. It is true for every person watching online, or who will stumble across this sermon at some point. St. Paul puts it this way: ***“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”*** (Galatians 4:4–5, ESV) Jesus was willing to suffer even the shame of the cross to pay the price for your sin. He died the death we deserve. But He also destroyed death by rising again to life! He calls us through His Word of life to know and believe in Him as our Saviour. He gives us His Holy Spirit to bring us to faith. St. Paul assures us: ***for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*** (Galatians 3:26 - ESV) We have a wonderful place in God’s family. We are His beloved children. That is the greatest thing that can be said of us.

Yet John points out that the world around us does not know us as the children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. How can they, when people don’t know God and His grace for us all? Remember how the people treated Jesus. Think of how many think of Jesus today. They have no place in their lives for the One who died for them. Sadly the world hates us, too, for being the children of God. In part that comes because as we live as the children we are, those around us are confronted with a truth they don’t want to know—the truth of sin and the truth of righteousness. They hate us because we don’t go with the crowd; rather, we are led by the truth of God and listen to our Father in heaven. But the world will do all it can to lead us away from our loving God. I hope I don’t have to tell you, my dear confirmands, that not everything you see and read and learn from the internet is true. The tweets and postings on all the social media stuff aren’t necessarily right just because they are popular and “liked” by people. The attitudes we see toward life issues, gender issues, race issues and on and on are not guided by the God who created us; the God who gave His Son to save us from our wrong ways and thoughts and deeds. They come from the rebellion against the truth of God—and so the world doesn’t want to see us for what we are: children, loved by God and precious to Him.

That is why I pray you will not only speak the words of your Confirmation vows today, but that you will take them to heart. I always worry that both parents and students look to Confirmation as an end in itself. Yet it is only a step on a journey. John reminds us that everything that goes with being God’s beloved children has been fully revealed yet. He does assure us: ***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.*** Sin still makes its presence known in our lives. Sometimes we are truly the saintly children of God. Other times we live as if we don’t belong in God’s family. We may not experience the full blessing of our sonship in this world. But we know what God has prepared for His faithful people. It is the very truth that we remember on All Saints’ Day—that those who have died in the faith are now with the Lord. They see Him as He is. They await the day of the resurrection of all flesh, when body and soul will be united again to be with the Lord in a life that will never end. When we get to heaven we will know the full joy of being the beloved children of God. Until that day we abide in hope, and that hope brings us peace and joy, even in the midst of the struggles, concerns and problems of this sinful world.

That’s who you are: beloved children of God, who has bought you back from sin and death; precious to the One who gave His life for you; saints through the Comforter who abides with you and leads you into this hope. He has brought us together, even now, into the wonderful family we call the church. In this family we can share our needs and our hurts with people who care about us, and find in them the support and help we need in the troubled times. But on this side of heaven we still have our problems. There are times of strife and discord, of anger and stubbornness, of selfishness and self-centeredness which are caused by the fact that every member of this family is a sinner. We don’t forgive as we should. We say things that hurt others. We do what we want, without any concern for the feelings of the other family members. That is why we need to keep coming back to the Saviour. In our sinful disregard of one another, we come and seek God’s mercy and grace again in Christ. And how blessed we are to be His children! He bestows on us the forgiveness we have in our brother, Jesus Christ. Knowing the life we have in Him and the glory that still awaits us, we follow the example of our brother and Saviour. As John says in our text: ***And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.***

This All Saints’ Day, and your Confirmation Day, is a great time to remember who we are. Although we don’t deserve it, we are the beloved children of God. My hope and prayer is that we will all remember the wonderful gift God has given us as His children, even as we look to the glorious day of our Epistle lesson, where John saw that ***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!”*** (Revelation 7:9-10 - ESV) Yes, He is our salvation! He has redeemed us to be His children. That’s who we are. That is who we will be forever. Amen.

