

Unknown to the World; Known to God

All Saints' Day

November 4, 2018

1 John 3:1-3

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

In the Name of Jesus.

The world does not know us, and can't.

The world knows what it sees. What it can count up and measure.

The world looks at the Church, and sees just a bunch of people meeting each Sunday, like people meeting at so many other times and places. All the world can know is that, somehow, these people meeting on Sunday want to be entertained, or they have shared interests, or they are getting together for some seminar on how to change their lives.

The world knows this kind of stuff. It happens all the time.

People want to be entertained, so they get together at a concert, or a basketball game, or a balloon fiesta. People have shared interests, so they get together at for a hobby group, or a political party, or a marathon to help raise money. People want to have changed lives, so they get together for a motivational seminar, or life-coaching conference, or an AA meeting.

So when the world looks at Christians gathering together each Sunday morning, they can guess that

what is going on is some sort of entertainment everyone is excited about, or some sort of common interests, such as a political movement, or some sort of coaching about how to improve your life.

This is predictable. For this is how things appear to the eyes. But the world does not know us. 1 John 3:1:

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.

We are God's children. We are God's children not because we gather for some excitement or entertainment. In our lives, we do that all the time, and this is good. Concerts, or basketball games, or whatever other excitement we like, this is a recognition of the Lord's gifts to our neighbors, and we do well to enjoy watching entertainers or athletes and appreciating the gifts the Lord gives them by which they serve their neighbor. But the enjoyment of these gifts of creation does nothing to make us children of God.

We are God's children not because of some shared interest. Sometimes we share an interest in a political cause, or in a hobby or project; sometimes we do not. In any case, this gives no fellowship with God.

We are God's children not because of a desire to change our lives. Even the Muslim, the Mormon, or the atheist wants to improve his life, and this desire for change is no mark of being a child of God.

We are God's children, says John, because we know Christ Jesus and he purifies us as he himself is pure.

But this is not seen to the eye.

To be purified by Christ Jesus is to hear his Gospel, to listen to his Word which forgives sin. This can't be seen; it's known by faith.

To be purified by Christ Jesus is to be washed in the water of Baptism, and in the promise of that Baptism, to be united to Jesus in his death and in his resurrection. [Romans 6]

But this can't be seen. What is seen is only water and the speaking of some words. This washing is known by faith, which holds tight to the promise Jesus speaks in Baptism.

To be purified by Christ Jesus is to hear his words, *Take and drink, this is my Blood for the forgiveness of your sins*, and to know that in that drink of wine, Jesus is giving you exactly what he says, *His blood for the forgiveness of your sins*.

But this is not seen. The eye sees wine. But faith knows that in his Word, Jesus has taken this bread and wine up into his use, so that in, with, and under this bread and wine, Jesus is coming to you in his Body and Blood to purify you.

The world does not know this, for it does not know Jesus.

And we ourselves, we forget it. For we still live in our sinful flesh, and by our flesh we are of the world, and in our flesh we see things the way the world does.

So we see our sin, and we forget, *we are children of God*. We see doubt in our hearts, and we forget, *we are children of God*. We see trouble in our families, we see conflict among Christians in the Church, and according to what we see, we forget, *we are children of God*.

So Jesus gathers us again to his Name. He gathers us again to this congregation of people which, to the world's eyes look just like any other gathering of people in the world, and gathering us to himself, he speaks the words to purify.

He again brings us back to the promise of our Baptism. So the Lord's Service begins with those baptismal words, *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*.

He speaks to us again the words absolving us of all sin. He bestows upon his people once again himself in his Body and Blood, where he cleanses us before his Father and binds us together as his people.

Jesus does all this through his Word, so that even though we cannot see it with our eyes, we may know

by faith what the world and our sinful flesh cannot know, 1 John 3:2:

Beloved, we are God's children now.

But John, in speaking this comfort to the Church, does not stop there. He speaks not just of the comfort of knowing that we are forgiven and are God's children, but he goes on to say what this means for our tomorrow, our eternity:

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.

With our eyesight, we cannot know the life that awaits us as children of God. How could we?

We see sickness and affliction. We see lies spoken and violence of neighbor against neighbor. We see families in pain and congregations in conflict. We see people struggling to live lives which have some appearance of being clean or worthy, people trying to justify selves.

When that's what we see, we can be sure that we cannot by our eyesight know anything of the eternal life prepared for us to which we now belong by faith.

When Jesus appears, says John, we will be like him, for we shall then see him as he is.

We will be like him, living in resurrected bodies no longer subject to sickness and death. We will be like him, standing before his Father in all confidence, with no guilt or shame. We will be like him, looking upon our brothers and sisters never with any jealousy or retribution, but fully with kindness and with thankfulness to our Lord for his gifts of our fellow saints.

We will be like Jesus, speaking blessing with no hesitation.

We do not see this now. How could we, while we still live in our bodies of sin?

But Jesus bestows it by his Word and we know it by faith.

And we rejoice, then, with all those who have preceded us, and who are now with the Lord.

We rejoice with those who first heard this Word of Gospel from John, some 2000 years ago. And with all those who were kept in the promise of their Baptism throughout the generations of the Church—including those who died by persecution, including those who lived in times of great travail and doubt, including our own loved ones who have died in the faith.

For all of these, along with us, are children of God. And for his children, there is no death, for he is the God of life. Everyone who has faith in him belongs to him. 1 John 3:3:

Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

In the Name of Jesus.