

All Saints Day/November 5, 2017
1 John 3:1-3/Family of Faith
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Deacon Jerry Stobaugh

“...but we know that when he appears we shall be like him...”

Many people study genealogies as a hobby. It is interesting to learn about the quirks of our ancestors. Perhaps we are related to some great historical character or some unsavory character. Perhaps an ancestor fought in the Civil or even Revolutionary War. Maybe you have ancestors who came over on the Mayflower. Some are even able to trace their ancestors back to the old country and learn of their history over there. Genealogies can be very interesting.

On this day of All Saints, we take a moment to consider a different kind of genealogy; a spiritual genealogy. Who are our ancestors in the faith? Who are the saints who went before us and confessed their faith in such a way that we who are now alive can also be saints?

Yes, I have called you saints for saints are those who have been made holy by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God makes us holy by robing us with the righteousness Jesus Christ earned with His suffering and death on the cross. Therefore, all who believe in Jesus Christ are saints.

So, today, we remember those believers, those saints who are now at rest with their savior. What is the God pleasing way to do that?

The writer of Hebrews gives us an excellent example by remembering the saints of the Old Testament [11:4-7]: “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still

speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” This chapter remembers past saints by remembering their confession of faith.

On this day, we especially remember those saints whose membership has been transferred from the Church Militant here on earth to the Church Triumphant in heaven during this past year: Roxie, Don, Bob, Jacqueline, John, Greg, Ruth, Al, Phil, Virginia, Steve, Irvan and Grace. What was their confession of faith? Indeed, what is the confession of faith that all Christians make?

That confession is summarized very well in today’s Epistle: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” In this confession, we see the genealogy of faith is very different from a biological genealogy. In a biological genealogy, there are fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts and uncles, cousins, and so forth. In the genealogy of faith, there is only one Father, and there are no grandparents, aunts, uncles, and so forth; for all the saints are brothers and sisters in Christ and children of God the Father.

It wasn’t always this way. There was a time we were not saints; not children of God. We were once a part of the genealogy of unbelief; a family tree of unbelievers. When God created Adam and Eve, they were His children; created in His image. They, along with all of creation, were very good. God arranged everything so Adam and

Eve were the beginning of what could have been one, great big, happy family. A united family of God.

Then the ancient serpent, the devil, came along and convinced them they would be better off without God as their Father. He actually convinced them they would be better off as orphans. As Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the family tree of unbelief was planted; a tree populated by orphans.

Why is the tree of unbelievers full of orphans? The problem is the law. God planted the law in the heart of man. It was a great blessing to Adam and Eve. Through the law, they had a strong, familial relationship with God as their Father. When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke that relationship. They rebelled against God as their Father and rejected Him. They became spiritual orphans; estranged from God their Father.

When Adam and Eve had children, they did not come forth in the image of God. Instead, they came forth in the image of Adam and wanted nothing to do with God the Father and are orphans. Ever since sin came into the world, this is the natural state of all people. We all inherit the image of our biological parents and so reject God as our Father. We are all born as spiritual orphans.

There is one Son who did not break His relationship with God the Father. This Son is the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. This Son came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. When we see this Son, we see what kind of love the Father has given to us.

As the Father's gift of love to us, Jesus lived in a perfect relationship with the Father. Even when the Father's will was for Jesus to suffer on the cross, Jesus held true to the relationship. He submitted to the will of the Father. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. In this way [Rom 5:8] "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Understand, while we were busy rejecting God and being orphans, God already had a plan in place to reconcile us with Him. He already had a plan to bring us back into the family; to once again become our Father. That plan reached its complete fulfillment when His only Begotten Son hung on a cross. In the shame of the cross, we see the Father's love. When we see the Father's only Begotten Son on the cross, we see what kind of love the Father has given to us.

As the Son pours forth the love of the Father from the cross, He joins us once again into the family of faith. We are no longer orphans; we are saints and children of the heavenly Father.

Today's epistle tells us of the blessing we receive as Children of God. "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." The day will come when our bodies will be just like the body of Christ; for Christ did not remain in the grave. Because of His victory on the cross, His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil, all Children of God do not remain in the grave after death. Instead, our bodies will rise to live in heaven forever on the last day. Jesus, Himself, was the first to rise and in Him we have the promise we too will rise from the dead. We will rise in our own bodies, but the sin and death will be gone. We will be sinless and immortal, living forever with God as His children.

As we remember those brother and sister saints who are now at home with their Lord, we also remember the confession of faith they made. The Holy Spirit used this confession to make us part of His family through faith. He made us into God's Children. We continue to receive the love of the Father as a gift. That love comes to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ with His suffering and death takes away our sin. He offers His holy life to us to take the place of sin. In God's eyes we become holy. As holy people we are saints; members of the genealogy of faith. As saints, our death will not lead to eternal suffering. Instead, we will rise in our purified bodies to a life without sin, suffering, shame, or death. We shall be like Jesus, because we shall see our risen Lord as he is. Praise be to God!