

“Adopted and the Owners of Everything!” (Gal. 3:23-4:7)

The 5th Sunday after Pentecost, June 23rd, 2013

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Adoption often gets a bad rap. When I was growing up for example, my older siblings would sometimes subject me to some psychological jabs. Since I had come along 8 years after my three older siblings, I was sometimes referred to as having been adopted. Today, I'm embarrassed by the fact that this used to bother me. I wish today that I had embraced it back then. You know how it is. How often we think to ourselves, "If I had only known then, what I know now!" Why embrace it? Because God's Word says to you and me dear Christian that every single one of here today for whom Jesus died and rose; and for us who have been baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus have been adopted into God's kingdom, into God's family, into God's magnificent and eternal love and mercy for us with the promise that He shall never, ever let us go.

This is where the proverbial rubber hits the road in terms of what makes the faith so invaluable. Last week I explained what faith is: 1) it is true; 2) it is trustworthy; and 3) it lives in the reality of the promises given...or simply said, it takes God up on His truth and trustworthiness...it actually lives in His grace, walks in His grace, and expresses its life in His grace. Just think of Peter when He saw Jesus walking on water: 1) He believed that Jesus was really there (that Jesus was true and real); 2) He believed that Jesus was able to call him unto Himself even on the water (Jesus was trustworthy); and 3) Peter actually stepped out and indeed – before he began to sink – Peter *was* walking on water. This is faith.

I bring this up because adoption is the assurance that we are indeed people of faith: it is the guarantee that God has called us, that God has united us to Jesus, that we have received the grace of God and the gift of faith, and it is the assurance that we are living never, ever alone, but always and constantly with the Holy Spirit. Do you have faith? To answer the question, just back up and ask yourself: "Well, am I adopted or not?" The answer is yes, esp. if you understand when and how God adopts you (answer: in Holy Baptism and by the power of the Word of God contained in the water which joined you to Jesus Christ). And if you are adopted, then yes, you have also received the gift of faith!

If you know this Christian, then you are called to live in great confidence and -- don't be shy about it now -- in the power of faith in God. This is a faith that might not be impressive to the world with its confused ideas about faith, but it is a faith led by the Spirit of God that leads you to face anything in life with the assurance that God is with you and that God will bless you

no matter what. No, this doesn't mean that you and I always get what we want or what we think we need. But it does mean that God will keep holding us as His adopted children and He will bless us...He always finds a way. And the reason you know that these are not just pious platitudes, is because the One who guarantees your adoption lived and died and rose for you!

Such faith flows from the knowledge that Jesus gave up His life for you and if God loves you that much, then The Father will not allow anything to interfere with the truth of the saving Gospel of His Son Jesus. Faith knows this to be true, because your faith knows that you are adopted/you belong to God. This faith figures that if Jesus could give His life for me, then I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He will always be for me and to erase all doubt He assures me of this reality because He came to me in Holy Baptism, and adopted me as His child.

And this is what makes our faith so glorious even in this veil of tears in the world and even as we bear crosses. It is true, but it is also extremely relevant. This is what the world needs to know about the Christian faith. It is true – based on what actually corresponds to a real state of affairs in space and time – but it is more than just true, it is exceedingly relevant. The world needs this sense of truth, relevance, importance, and meaning. It is true that this past week the Miami Heat won their 3rd NBA championship, but many of you could care less. It may be true, but it isn't terribly relevant. But when it comes to faith, the truth of the Gospel of Jesus and the life it produces in becoming adopted heirs of God means that our whole lives are impacted: we have clarity about our identity, our purpose, and our destination; and we have gifts poured out from God to live as His adopted people. The faith is true, it is relevant, and it is exciting...and it is on account of our adoption that we begin to see clearly about these things.

But it begins by embracing the guarantee that you are indeed a child of God; not called to doubt who you are, but to be absolutely clear about it. You are a child of God, because you are adopted. That means that this word "adopted" can't be a weird thing, but a glorious status. We should say with pride and joy: "I am adopted!"

When Traci and I adopted five of our eight children, our lives changed for the good; it taught us to live our faith; to get out of ourselves; and it has humbled us more than we can say. I once thought that I had raising children down. Then God humbled me and true to the saying dear Christians, humility really is good for the soul! The Lord also corrected my feeble and sinful ideas. To my great shame, many years ago before our first adoption, I had once wondered if I could love an adoptive child as much as one born from my wife's womb. Now I ask myself, "How could I have ever asked such a question?" The answer is: "Absolutely!" and to the extent that I cannot imagine my life without Christina, David, Esbyedi, Bryan, and Katherine...as time

goes on, I know that we are living out God's plan for us, inextricably contributing to our formation as "Al and Traci."

In addition, I have seen many added instances of love poured out. My wife has taught our children that to be adopted is to be additionally loved. It means that natural parents loved you and wanted more for you than what they could give, and it means that adoptive parents chose you and wanted to give you the best they had to offer.

Traci has put it this way to our children: you were born in your birthmother's tummy, and you were born in my heart. My wife has put adoption in terms of a second birth and in doing so has paralleled the teaching of God's Word: that is exactly what adoption is: the result of our being baptized/born again/clothed with Christ. See the connection within today's epistle:

First, we are assured of being united to Christ through Baptism:

Galatians 3:27: ***"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."***

Second, we are therefore given assurance that we are saved since Christ -- Whom we have put on -- came to:

Galatians 4:5: ***"redeem those who were under the law"***

Third, we now have a new status:

Galatians 4:5 again: ***"so that we might receive adoption as sons."***

And finally, this impacts our lives to the extent that we now have the Holy Spirit and a new standing and status with God:

Galatians 4:6-7: ***"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."***

The original language here is delightful! We are being taught that we are no longer a child confined to a babysitter (the law); that child being a "napios" which is a non-speaking one who is no different than a "doulos" or a slave according to Galatians 4:1. But now that Christ has liberated us by His life, death, and resurrection, and adopted us through baptism, and given the gift of the Holy Spirit to us, we are no longer a "napios"/child with no voice and no rights,

but we are now a “huios” or “son” [the point here is not about sex or gender, but about legal standing; “son” = an heir with full rights, and to clarify that God isn’t taking about male and female, He says at Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither male nor female]. Now here’s the thing about the “huios” over “napios”: you now have full rights. You can speak and you will be heard by the Father! You have a voice, because you are an adopted child who is dearly, dearly loved. The Father cares about every prayer you offer up regardless and they are prayers that have His complete attention even as He answers them in accord with what is best for you, even if you don’t see it. In the meantime, all that is the Father’s is now yours. You’re family now!

It’s true, when the Lord led us to adopt our children, they left their old lives behind and entered our lives. And what is ours is now theirs. Our house – which is God’s house – is not “my house,” but our family’s house...it is Katherine’s house, Bryan’s house, Esbeydi’s house, David’s house, and Christina’s house...in fact, in some ways it is more their house than it is mine...there are many days that they enjoy it more than I do; and furthermore, the children are fortunate enough to have their own rooms (a distinction that I don’t even have...not that I’m complaining [spoken to my wife esp.]!)

But you’ve probably noticed that this Lutheran pastor of yours really hasn’t preached much law...I’ve been saving it for now.

Traci and I quickly learned that many people struggle to “get” adoption. 15 years ago or so, Traci was in a grocery store and a woman was gazing at our baby. She would look at the baby and then look at Traci; look at Traci and then look at the baby...and this expression of complete and utter bewilderment was all over her face. She just couldn’t make her assumption compute in her mind. “How did this white-skinned, blonde-haired, blue-eyed gal give birth to this dark-skinned, black-haired, brown-eyed baby?!” The woman just couldn’t help herself and so asked my wife, “What does the father look like?” I’ll stop the story here. You can ask my wife what she said if you want to. But this is not an uncommon scenario. There is a natural dissonance that takes place in the minds of many people.

But it is one that precisely makes the point about how we struggle with this amazing truth of our adoption. We look at God (and know that He is righteous; He is holy; He is without sin); and then we look at ourselves. We look at God, we look at ourselves. We look at ourselves and we look at God. Then we ask, “How can this be?” And then we doubt.

This is our sin. We terribly underestimate the power and the reality of God’s amazing grace; we doubt and question the truth and the power of the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus; we try to convince ourselves that our baptism was just some ceremony that

happened a long time ago and we sinfully underestimate exactly what happened when we were adopted and therefore we question our very adoption itself.

In our sin we treat that which is extremely and indescribably valuable as if it had no value. This very thing happened to the Christian monks at St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai in Egypt.

The monks were visited in 1844 by a German researcher named Constantin von Tischendorf, who had come to search for ancient manuscripts of the Bible's Old and New Testaments. He found piles of extremely valuable Bible manuscripts that were sitting in a wastebasket, waiting to be burned! Included in this wastebasket were two of the most ancient and valuable manuscripts of the Bible that survive to this day.

The monks of St. Catherine's had no idea of the immense value of what they possessed (taken from an article within *Good News*, Issue 32, p. 30). This is what we do with our adoption guarantee: with the saving Gospel of Jesus and with our magnificent baptism. How often do we toss these aside and let them linger by the wastebasket as we tend to what we sinfully think is so much more important in life? We dabble with the things that are passing away and will be forgotten at the expense of neglecting the most important and lasting things!

But thanks be to God that this is not what the Lord has done or is doing with you. Since He has covered you with Christ in Holy Baptism (Galatians 3:27), you have received a totally new status in God's sight. God, in His miracle of Baptism, has adopted you and immediately covers you with Christ's perfect righteousness and holiness. God has declared you redeemed (purchased from the realm of sin and death) and has declared you justified (declared righteous). He no longer sees your sin. Others may see it. You see it, but God does not! Why not? Because Christ covered you with His blood; God baptized you into His Son; because you are now adopted.

You are God's very own, welcomed into His family, belonging to the household of faith, with full rights, filled with the Holy Spirit...with a voice that cries out, "Abba! Father!" And the Lord hears you and answers you, because He now counts you as family, welcomed to His table where you are served and strengthened by the body and blood of Jesus which does more than galvanize your adoption, but don't be surprised by this, because you're family now! What is the Lord's is yours, even to the extent of giving you His very body and blood guaranteeing the sanctity of His words to you: "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)." You have these gifts, because He has adopted you and now -- as Galatians 4:1 says -- you are the owner of everything: that which belongs to the Father like eternal life and eternal love now belongs to His adopted child, you. Thank God that we are adopted!