

Children of God

1 John 2:28-3:10

WHAT WE FOUND

The thunderclap: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; *and so we are*" (3:1). Not a courtesy title, not a legal fiction: a real begetting. John reserves *Son* for Jesus alone and calls us *tekna*, born ones, because only one is Son by nature, yet God's own life is truly communicated to us, at the font, by water and the Spirit (CCC 1265-1266). The Fathers said it fearlessly: God became man so that we might become god, by participation. And when the world fails to comprehend us, that is family resemblance: it did not know him either.

We found Eden under the whole passage: God put enmity between two seeds (Genesis 3:15), and John's two families, children of God and children of the devil, are that war grown up. The Son appeared "to destroy the works of the devil" (3:8): the head-crushing, accomplished. We are God's children *now*; what we shall be is hidden; but "when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (3:2), and everyone who so hopes purifies himself (3:3). Hope is an engine, not a mood.

And we wrestled the hard verse honestly: "no one born of God commits sin" (3:9) beside "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1:8). Many interpreters find the resolution in the tense (sin as ongoing practice, a way of life), and the letter itself supplies the logic of origin: nothing that comes from the abiding seed of God produces sin, so when we fall, the sin is our own free act, but it does not flow from our new birth: it betrays it, and the remedy is the letter's great verb: abide. St. Leo's charge carries the week: Christian, remember your dignity.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Athanasius *On the Incarnation, 54*

Athanasius compresses the whole doctrine into one fearless sentence: the Son of God became man so that we might become god. He does not mean we acquire the divine nature as our own; he means the Incarnation's purpose is our real participation in God's life, exactly the begetting John announces. The Fathers did not flinch from 3:1, and neither should we.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great *Sermon 21, On the Nativity*

Leo's Christmas charge is the pastoral edge of tonight's text: Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember whose head and whose body you are a member of. For Leo, moral life is memory: sin is forgetting whose child you have become.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book V, Preface*

Irenaeus states the exchange at the heart of the Gospel: the Word of God, out of his boundless love, became what we are in order to bring us to be what he himself is. The two-family battle John describes is, for Irenaeus, the long war begun in Eden, and the divine begetting is its turning point: the serpent's seed is defeated by making the woman's seed our brother.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Find your baptism date this week (call a parent or the parish if you must) and put it in your calendar as a permanent annual feast. Then thank God for it by name each morning: "Father, you begot me; I am your child now."

2.

Memorize 1 John 3:1 and pray it once, slowly, every time you feel unknown, dismissed, or out of place this week.

3.

Practice Leo's remedy once a day: at your most predictable temptation, stop and say "Christian, remember your dignity," and act from the birth, not the mood.

MEMORY VERSE

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **1 John 3:11-24**. Keep the second blank sealed. As you read, note the one Old Testament name John reaches for, the only proper name in the whole letter besides Jesus, and ask yourself why him.

Catechism Connection: CCC 1265-1266; 460; 2782-2784