

Fourth Sunday of Easter

People sometimes introduce themselves with their relationship instead of their name. “I’m Lindsay’s mom.” “I’m Mike’s brother.” “I’m Dave’s roommate.” They have a name. They have their own identity, but in the moment—whether it’s a function at a school, at church or a reunion, people may identify who they are by their relationship to someone else. Baptized Christians also identify ourselves by a relationship. We are “children of God.”

During Easter Time this year the second readings at Sunday Mass come from the First Letter of John. As we work our way through the significant passages, we hear two verses today that may also be proclaimed at ceremonies that mark the turning points of life: baptisms and funerals. They tell us who we are when it matters most.

Today’s passage opens with the words, “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God.” St. Paul calls us “adopted” children of God. Jesus was the Son of God by the incarnation. We are also children of God because of our adoption. Adoptive parents love so much that they let the child of other birth parents be called their child. For St. John, this is a big deal: God lets us be called his children. That’s how much God loves us.

At Mass when the priest introduces the Lord’s Prayer, he often says we “dare” to call God our Father. It alludes to a commentary on the Lord’s Prayer by St. Cyprian of Carthage. We dare to call God Father because he lets us be called his children.

This relationship provides us comfort and guidance every day, especially when we encounter people who hold different values. Some people dwell in confrontation, whether in person or online. They seem happier to score differences than to delight in cooperation. Some people don’t get us. They don’t know the values that make us tick. St. John has strong words when he writes, “The reason the world does not know us is that it does not know [God].” John distances the opinion of other people from the reality of who we are. Others may think less of us, but to God, our identity is in our relationship. We God’s children.

John concludes this reflection by looking to the future, to the end of our lives. He addresses the readers of his letter as those he loves, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed.” John believes in a future that we see indistinctly. But this much he knows: “When it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” God created us. God became our Father in our baptism. God accompanies us when the rest of the world does not. God awaits us, to welcome us into his presence.

We all have relationships. We may not be proud of some of them. We may find ourselves in a group where we feel we just don’t belong. Sometimes the company we keep establishes unhealthy relationships. Other company gives us life and purpose. We’re proud to introduce ourselves to others by naming that connection. According to the First Letter of John, we can always feel good about our most important relationship: We are children of God.