

Trinity VIII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

Galatians 4.4-7

Imagine that you had someone working for you on a regular basis, someone you had especially and carefully hand-picked and trained for the work. You trusted them with everything you had. Then, one day, you catch them stealing from you. Your trust has been betrayed and your efforts wasted. What would you do? Well, let's say that you are generous and kind and that, though you discipline this person, you allow them to continue to work for you and give them an opportunity to redeem themselves. But still they

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only continue to steal, cheat, lie, neglect their work and abuse the other workers. Finally, they get in so much trouble that they are bankrupt. What would you do?

Would you consider that the only option left you was to adopt this bankrupt servant as your own son, to pay off all his debt at your own expense, and to make him an heir to your fortune?

That is what God the Almighty has done for us. The story of our salvation is told best in terms of our adoption and forgiveness. St. Paul speaks in both Galatians and Romans of the mission of the Son and the Spirit, in exactly these terms. God sent his Son, that we might be adopted, and God fills us with the Spirit of his Son, to both convince us and transform us as God's children. In Galatians 4, the work of the Son is to redeem and to adopt. God gave his Son to redeem his servants. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.

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To be saved is to know yourself to be a sinner, a rebellious servant of your Creator and Lord. Apart from Christ, we are God's good creatures gone bad, but we are not God's children. For apart from Christ, we do not have that kinship with God, through his incarnate Son. To be saved is to know yourself to be a sinner, and to come to know yourself in Christ as a redeemed son or daughter, the forgiven child of God. In Christ alone, we know God as our loving, forgiving, saving Father. We were rebellious servants, but we have become redeemed children. For God sent his Son to become our brother in the flesh.

When God the Son becomes our brother, in the flesh, we then may become, through him, the children of his Father in the Spirit. In Jesus, God has adopted humanity. Having then taken us up and embraced us in Jesus, God pays off the debt of bankrupt humanity on the cross. By the death of Jesus, our debts are forgiven. And then God makes us, in Jesus, heirs of his kingdom. By faith and by the

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Holy Spirit, we are born again as the redeemed children of God. To know Jesus, the Son of God and the Redeemer, is the way to know yourself, the child of God and the redeemed.

St. Paul compares for us the service of slaves and of sons or daughters. We are to live and serve, not out of a servant's fear, but in a son's or daughter's love and trust and confidence. We are called to serve and to suffer as children. The servant–master relationship is typified by fear. But the father-son or father-daughter relationship is typified by love. We serve not out of fear, but out of love. And we live not in dread, but in confidence. Servants may come and go. They get hired and fired, but a child is your child forever. “The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever.” John 8.35

All this is the gift of God's grace, through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. For it is by the interior witness of the Holy Spirit,

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that we are convinced that we are God's children. And we are made bold by the Spirit, so that we can confidently cry, "Abba! Father!"

The instruction of our Catechism reminds us of these benefits of our salvation, which are effectively communicated to us in Christian Baptism. In Baptism, we were made members of Christ. And since we came to belong to Jesus, we were made children of God. As such, we are heirs, or inheritors, of the kingdom of heaven. That Catechism teaches us, that in Christ, we are the children and heirs of God.

Today, though, we recall the grace of our saving adoption. We are redeemed children, so that we might know how to live and serve.

Listen again to that Epistle: My spiritual sisters and brothers, we owe nothing to our bodily passions. If you say yes to every desire that comes along, you will die. But if with the help of God's spirit you learn to say no to the flesh and to yourself, you will live.

Anyone who is led by God's Spirit is God's child. You were once

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servants who obeyed out of fear, but you are now children who serve out of love. And this difference between a servant and a son, you must grasp and cling onto and celebrate. It is God's Holy Spirit working in you, agreeing with your own spirit, that allows you to know and believe and trust and call upon God, as your dear, loving heavenly Father. God's Spirit is in you, to convince you that you are, with all his redeemed people, his beloved child. And no second-rate child! You are a son or daughter of God through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And with Jesus, you are a first-born child, with all the privilege of the full and greatest inheritance. All this is yours, and shall be yours, if only you cling to Jesus. And that means following him and his example, in this world, suffering, self-denial and service, and in the world to come, glory, life and peace.

Our Epistle holds out before us, then, the wonderful privilege of being children of God, which is ours through Christ. Our Gospel holds out the great test of being God's children. It is by our deeds

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that we shall be known and tested. It is doing our Father's will, our active, free and loving obedience, which proves that we are God's children . Simply put, if we are God's children, we do our Father's will. As Jesus said of himself, so we must be about our Father's business. And it is that growing moral conformity to Jesus himself, which proves that because of him, and like him, we are God's children.

You are God's beloved child. He has chosen you and redeemed you as such. He has sealed and marked you as his child in Baptism. And he would assure and reassure you, of his everlasting forgiveness and love. Amen. +