

All Saints' Sunday – Epistle

CRUCIFORM SAINTS

1 John 3:1-3

All Saints' Sunday

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

DIAGNOSIS: Lost Children

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Do I Know You?*

When someone does something out of character, friends will jokingly say, "Do I know you?" The friends may be teasing in fun. Or they may be hurt and seriously mean it. People get to know each other by their actions. High school students will immediately notice if a classmate dresses in a different style than usual and comment on it. When at work, if a normally very patient machinist starts yelling in anger, her coworkers will ask, "What is wrong with you? You're usually so patient!" Parents may be cruel to misbehaving children and say to them, "No child of mine would do such a thing!" By actions people are known. Actions come from the heart. What comes from the heart makes a person clean or unclean, pleasant or mean, ignored or seen. People try hard to be known in a way that gives them a

reputation-good or bad. People who are known to be kind and helpful and polite will be called saints. Few get such a title, since a saint lives far above the usual mediocre level of being nice.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *I Do Not Know Him!*

When people act erratically, when they act in ways that embarrass those who love them, others may respond, “I don’t want to know you.” When a person behaves in ways that demean the weaker, she will be shunned and scorned. The person acting out of the ordinary will not trust those who tell her that she is acting strange or that something must be wrong. When judgment is given, it is not accepted. Similarly, when God’s rules are used to give judgment, God’s judgment is not trusted. Anyone who would deny another a good evaluation will not be loved. People do not trust the God whose law is always accusing us of unbelief and a lack of trust in God. That law also accuses us of not really caring for our neighbors. People will not trust such a judge and so refuse to acknowledge, trust, or even know the God who judges. And the few that get the title of saint also do not trust such a judge, for they prefer to trust how well they have done.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *We Are Orphans*

When God is not known, when God is not loved or trusted, everything from God is rejected because such judgments simply can’t come from God. God is not acknowledged. God is cursed. Such people are thus not in the family of God. They deny that God is their Father who gives goodness, who rains on the just and the unjust. Without the goodness of God in people, God has left them to their own pursuits, their own strengths, and their own resources to deal with misfortune and evil. Without the God who gives life, people are left with the absence of life-even the absence of death. Death is orphaned-disassociated-from God.

People are not saints at all-ever.

PROGNOSIS: The Father Claims the Lost as His Children.

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *The Father Finds Us In Love.*

Absent of cause or reason, God, whose word has denied us family status and has declared us to be far less than saints, acts in a way that we have not seen before. God gives us his loving mercy in Jesus. Jesus continues God's before-unseen behavior by forgiving those who do not accept or trust God. Jesus gives mercy to the most unsaintlike people-the ungodly, the unloving, the impatient, the coarse, and even some brutish fisherman. His behavior is seen as unsaintly, as going against God's requirements of what a saint should be. A saint should keep the laws to be holy. The law demands it. The law demands an end to unsaintlike behavior. So Jesus is crucified, a most unsaintly position. But God, again acting against the expectations for God, raises the crucified one! God declares that the crucified, now risen, Jesus is the way of holiness, the way of being a child of God. And a crucified and risen child of God is called a saint.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) – *We Are God's Children Now.*

Jesus gives his sainthood to us. All that he has done-death and rising-are ours. His status as God's child is ours. His sainthood is ours. That's his promise to us. By trusting his promise, having faith, we receive all that he has done and all that he owns. It's as if we had died and risen ourselves. That is the effectiveness of faith. We are God's children now, because that is what we are in Christ, the children of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *I Know Him!*

People around us will never recognize us as saints, for they do not see a crucified Jesus to be a saint. Crucifixion tends to ruin the purity of saintliness. People who see an impatient manager at work will not see the same woman kneeling before a table to receive the crucified and risen body and blood of Jesus. A grizzled, middle-aged man in dirty jeans, stocking cap, and a stained coat seen daily picking up littered soda cans will not be called a saint. For few see that beneath the cap on his forehead and upon his breast there is a mark of the cross of Jesus, "a token that he has been redeemed by Christ the crucified." A child turns to her friend sitting next to her at the table in the school's noisy cafeteria, a friend others have made fun of, and quietly says to her, "You are good. Jesus says so." No one in the cafeteria notices. But God never misses seeing those who look like his son Jesus. And God calls them saints. God loves them as his children. God raises them up to life forever with him. That is how we are saints. We are like Jesus. Then we offer Jesus to the impatient, the coarse, the proud, to those who are so busy, and to those who do not trust God in the midst of cancer treatments. Jesus makes you a saint. See? Here, his cross is for you.