

Firsts & Worsts

Beloved, 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. —1 Jn 3:2

I've titled today's sermon 'firsts & worsts', because in times like these of trial and transition, we are all given some great opportunities to try things for the first time, but at the same time all this newness can be a struggle. I've had a first in my video podcasts with two fellow priests. This has been great for us, except the time when we went through the whole first episode and forgot to press record! Our parish council had a first in our zoom meetings, helping us carry on good stewardship of this church virtually. But it went far from smoothly. One person's video worked, but not the audio. One person's audio worked, but not the video. I'm sure you've all had your own firsts and worsts in your adjustment to the new normal.

And I know from talking to many of you-and from my own experience-that there have been some firsts and worsts also at home. Narek accomplished his first power point presentation and book report for school. Nora is reading her first books, in imitation of Narek. But their first months together in Yn. Anna's one room schoolhouse has also been a struggle. They can argue about anything and everything. Last Monday, Narek was reading Nora a book, and finishing up the last page, he said 'thuh end.' "No!" yelled Nora, "it's the End!" "Thuh end" insisted Narek, and they went back and forth 10 times before Nora threw the book in Narek's face. The first here is that our kids are spending so much time together, the worst is that figuring out how to work together is not easy.

I'm not telling you about all these firsts and worst just to vent out my quarantine fever. They are very much related to today's epistle reading, which reminds us that in God's eyes, all of us, at all times in our lives, are like children experiencing our firsts and worsts as we grow into Him. 'Beloved, we are God's children now;' writes John the Apostle, 'what we will be has not yet been revealed.' In other words, growth and change is baked into the human condition, because what we are now is not what we are destined to be as children of our heavenly father, destined for his kingdom.

The challenge here is that we tend to hide from our firsts and worsts as we get older. Unlike children, we want to show everyone that we are in control of our situation, that we are self-sufficient, that we don't need anyone else's charity, much less God's. But the truth of this life, revealed in times of trial like these, is that we aren't in control. The truth is that no matter how much you know, how proficient you are, how strong you are, you and I will constantly be confronted in this life with things we you don't know, that we can't control, that is beyond our own ability to provide. This it seems is the great grace and significance behind the trials and struggles of our lives. They humble us-if we would let them-to become like children, to recognize our limits and to look to God and others for help.

And today's reading reminds us that just as we help each other and our children through their firsts and worsts, so does God help us. I think we can imagine that God views each first step forward and each fall in our spiritual "walks" with the eagerness of a parent watching a child take their first step or read their first book. Whether you are seven or eighty-seven, we are all children of God. And any time you or I take one step forward to follow Christ-to forgive someone who wronged us or to let go of self-sufficiency and lean more on God-I imagine that God is like a very proud parent of his children. I imagine that he quickly forgives our worsts and encourages us to keep striving for the firsts which mature us toward greater things in this world even unto the next.

So perhaps when the secrets of the universe are finally revealed, when "what we will be has been revealed," we will see more clearly the underlying purpose of this life full of first and worsts. We might see that as often as we bear with the firsts and worsts of each other and ourselves, God bears with ours. We might find that all of life is trail and change because God wishes us not just to be a slightly better you or me, but to be transformed, to 'be like him,' something beyond all earthly comprehension. And to get there, we must learn to change, to humble ourselves and to trust-like little children-that God will take our hand and lead us to where we cannot go alone, now and always, amen.