

“You are incognito royals!” 1 John 3:1-3

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Amazing message we heard today from Jesus’ beloved disciple John. So fitting for our meditations on the All-Saints Day. If only we could fully understand these few verses... we would be the most hopeful, the most joyful people. We would...

Let us reflect on what John writes and see how much hope and joy are given to us. **“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”**

This may be an unusual question, but... how many of you have seen the movie “Coming to America”? It is an older movie from the 1980s starring Eddie Murphy. The plot is rather simple and quite lovely. Eddie Murphy plays Akeem Joffer, the crown prince of the fictional African nation of Zamunda.

The young prince travels to the US incognito with the hope of finding a woman who would love him for who he is, not for his status or wealth. So, he gives up anything that may betray his royal connections. He settles in one of the poorest parts of New York City, pretends to be an exchange student and finds a job in a local fast-food restaurant. And so, the journey begins.

Why would I mention this old movie? There is something remarkable about the main hero, prince Akeem. He and his trusted servant live in a bad neighbourhood, they get robbed, in their workplace they are expected to do the most menial tasks and get humiliated and mistreated in many ways.

Yet, the incognito royal prince Akeem goes through all of that glowing like the happiest person on the earth. Whatever happens, he sees the bright side, whatever he is asked to do, he does it joyfully, he seems to never run out of hope and good and self-confident mood.

Those who don’t know who he is are often surprised by his attitudes and stature, they are attracted to his radiant persona. They are left wondering – what is it about this guy, why is he so different? The answer to all that mystery is – his identity. He knows who he is. Beloved and adored son of his parents. He knows His significance – he is an heir to the throne of Zamunda. He knows what awaits him in future – he

will reign over that abundant and luxurious kingdom. How could he not be hopeful, joyful, confident, courageous, beaming out of the very heart of his royal persona! Do you see where this is going? This is a near perfect illustration of who you are. Incognito royals for a while living in a strange land. Yes, you!

For a while separated from the royal glory and abundance, for a while living among people who don't know who you truly are, for they don't know your true Father, who is in heaven. For a while needing to endure different hardships.

This is you. And even if everything goes great in our lives, success and pleasures and joys abound, still... That is nothing compared to what our God has prepared for His children. Hear this: **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so, we are."** And so, this is who you are, children of God the Father.

There is no greater identity, no higher status, there is no more hopeful future, there is no more valid reason for gladness, there is no more definite security about what is to come than being children of God. And this is who you are.

Your Father is not just a king over an earthly country. He is the Creator and Eternal Ruler of the Universe, of all the things visible and invisible. And He gladly calls you – just dwell on this for a moment! – He gladly calls you, each one of you: "My beloved child!" Once He calls you that way, that is who you are. That becomes your main, most significant and most enduring identity.

Children of God. So, we live as incognito royals in this world, and the world doesn't know who we truly are. As John put it: **"The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."**

The world doesn't know our Father and it doesn't want to know Him. The world goes on stubbornly denying that they live here as tenants, not as owners. This place, this bountiful planet doesn't belong to them, the time they spend doesn't belong to them, even their bodies and souls do not belong to them.

One day all of that will be required back by the true owner. Perhaps this is why the world is so spiteful towards their gracious and generous and incredibly patient Landlord. They recognize their own finite nature and limits and that there is no escape from the day when all accounts will need to be settled.

Perhaps that is why the world so often is hostile to children of God. For they don't really know our Father, they have only that twisted idea about Him, imagining Him as mere boring and hateful killjoy and judge!

The world doesn't know that He is our Creator, that He Himself personally and with Fatherly love and passion has formed and shaped each one of us in our mother's womb, that He daily provides for us everything that we need for this body and soul.

Moreover, even as we did abandon Him and became slaves to death and the fear of death, He hasn't abandoned us. He has done everything to rescue us from the jaws of death and to bring us back into His Kingdom of life.

Our God has revealed the incredible depth of His love by becoming one of us, by living among us, by giving up His life in the most painful and shameful death on the cross – so that only He can regain our hearts, our trust, our affections.

Not compulsory, but freely, when we learn what His heart and unconditional commitment towards us is in His true Son Jesus Christ. This is what your Father is like. The whole world, every human being longs for what only He can give us.

What are those things? We long for true greatness, for deep meaning, for most amazing joy and pleasures, for unconditional acceptance and passionate love, for grand mission and honourable responsibilities, for future hope, and so on.

And He wants to give all of that to everyone, to everyone! it is just that... people reject Him, mock Him, despise Him and thus cut themselves off the only source that would bring them true, ultimate and everlasting fulfillment and happiness.

The fate of the unbelieving world is so tragic. But our greatest problem may not be that the world doesn't know our Father. I think an even worse problem is that we tend to forget who we are. Yes, we are guilty of that.

It is true that those with power and influence in this world often look down at us, as remnants from darker ages, guided by some ancient book, still fighting against science and progress, oppressing minorities, etc.

That's how they see us. And how has the Church responded? Standing tall and confessing God's beautiful truth winsomely? Casting a beautiful vision of new life in Christ? Living it out with joy? We wish...

Too often Christians have acted as teenagers with low self-esteem, vulnerable to any critiques, desperate to please, not thinking much of themselves, ready to do whatever it takes to get some affirmation from those with cultural influence.

"You do not like us? You want us to change? Just tell us how! Do we take the Word of God too seriously? Okay, we will slow down, we will listen to you more. You do not like how we worship? Too reverent? Okay, we will try to come up with something entertaining. You do not like Christian virtues and holy life? Okay, live as you prefer, it's fine with us. Just be friendly with us!"

Haven't Christians acted as people with low self-esteem? And after this was done, we began to wonder – why is the Church in the West fading away? Because there was little left that would make the Church the Church. No more beauty, no more depth, no more holiness, no more wisdom. For misguided Christians themselves sacrificed those treasures in desperate attempts to please the world.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” We would benefit from meditating on this every day.

What is prepared for you, what is coming, what you will be made like, what you will inherit, what your life in the age to come will be like – all of that vastly surpasses anything we can imagine, or dream or comprehend.

Reflect on this! When Jesus Christ appears in His divine glory to restore His creation, in the company of all the mighty angels and archangels and all the strange and frightening heavenly beings, you shall be like Him.

Pause and reflect! *You shall be like Him!* If only we could understand what it means?! What a wonderful mystery to marvel about?! What an incredible promise to meditate upon, to read about, to wonder, to discuss, to share.

This is said about you. About you! You shall be like the risen Lord, God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This is God’s promise to you from the very lips of the Holy Spirit. How can we not be curious and fascinated to learn more?

Therefore, **“everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”** Yes, we want that hope, how do we purify ourselves? This is not something we can do on our own. Remember the Gospel reading from last Sunday?

“If you truly want to be my disciples, abide in my Word, for thus you will know the truth, and the truth will sanctify you and purify you and will set you free. Abide in my word!” Remember this? It is Jesus speaking to you!

If you have been distracted to focus too much on this world instead of the world where we truly belong, if the devil has deceived you and made you a fool who has almost forgotten your true and everlasting identity – come and abide in the Word!

Our God never leaves or abandons His own, especially when we are deceived and misled. He is faithful, He is patient, He keeps speaking to us: “Return to me! Abide in my words, and I will purify you! More...

I will fill you with eternal hope and joy and peace and wisdom! I will fill you with my own Spirit! I will make you like a lighthouse, beaming brightly and walking through this life as incognito royals, for that is who you are!” That’s Jesus speaking to you.

That is not by an accident that the Scripture says that blessed is the one who meditates on the Word of God days and nights. Such Christians are like trees planted at the streams of water, bearing richly their fruits in due season.

I pray that the same could be said about us: “Blessed are these people, these incognito royals at Grace Oshawa, for they meditate upon and delight in the Word of God days and nights! And their fruits are abundant, bringing blessings and joy to many. And soon enough together with all the saints they shall see their Lord Jesus Christ as He is and will be like Him.” This is certainly true. Amen.