

# **Who am I, where do I go, how to live?**

## **Psalm 4; Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-11; Luke 24:36-48**

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Who am I?

Where do we go?

For many people these are the urgent questions of life. And if they are not, they should be. Because they answer a third important question:

How should we then live?

Not having answers to these questions may lead to a deep crisis in the human soul: to an identity crisis.

Let us see what St John has to tell us about this. He was a disciple of Jesus, so we can consider him an expert in the truly important matters he witnessed the death and resurrection of our Lord; later, as a missionary, he worked in Ephesus in Turkey.

In his letter from which we read a part this morning, he writes about our identity, our destiny, and about proper behavior.

### **1 What we are today**

Who we are? John's answer is clear: 'We are called children of God! And that is what we are!'

I know it is popular to speak of all people in this world as God's children. Sure, it is good to underline our common value as human beings, and our equality. And in the sense that we are all created by God, yes, all people on this planet are God's children.

But St John does not assume we are all God's children in a spiritual sense. He even underlines the distinction between those who are spiritually God's children, and those who are not.

John says: 'This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child.' So John does not assume all people are children of God.

God calls us - people who believe in and follow his first child, Jesus, he call us his children. This is not just a sweet title, but a reality. It is not just a matter of a metaphorical title, it is not legal fiction, or adoption human-style as having a foster child. Because we believe in Jesus the Son of God, for God we are like Jesus. We are his children. We are members of his family.

It is a marvelous fact that God freely gives us this supernatural dignity, an intimacy with God as part of his community.

Yes, we are men and women, young and old, from Zimbabwe, Egypt or the USA, and our nationality is an important part of who we are. Our jobs create a form of identity. Our education does.

But that we belong to God as his children, that is the deepest layer of our identity. All the other things are secondary.

Josemaria Escriva, in *Christ Is Passing By*, p. 133, writes:

This is the great boldness of the Christian faith - to proclaim the value and dignity of human nature and to affirm that we have been created to obtain the dignity of children of God, through the grace that raises us up to a supernatural level.

These are big words. What does this mean for us today? Too much to deeply go into now, but some suggestions.

It means that God is not angry at you; that He is not scary; it means that you can be fully assured that the creator of the universe wants the best for you; it means that the one who will one day judge all people, is on your side; it means that you go and sleep each night assured - God cares for you.

It means you can live with the satisfaction and the full confidence that He cares for you - it is as if you sit in the lap of the Father of the universe. whatever happens, Father cares for us. And we can talk with him as if we sit at his feet.

It also makes our life harder. This world is a mess, and it is upside down, rebelling in many areas against God. If you have been put on your feet by being a child of the heavenly Father, there is friction with members of your family, with friends, with society that is still upside down. Life can be quite hard if you want to live as a child of God.

Be we have an anchor in heaven - God is on our side and that counts most. And lasts forever.

## **2 Where we shall be one day**

John then continues to speak of this Christian destiny:

Dear friends, *now* we are children of God, and *what we will be* has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Let us first note that John is refreshingly honest. He says that we do not know what we will be one day. Compare this to many preachers who focus on the fine details of all things eschato-

logical, on the end of times, or on what heaven will look like. The apostles did not know much and they admitted this.

John Stott, in his commentary on *The Epistles of John* [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries] (Leicester, 1960, 1983), pp. 118-119, says:

It is important to note this apostolic confession of ignorance... The Christian is not omniscient... It is idle and sinful to speculate or to pry into things which God has not been pleased to make known.

We know very little about our future, but with John we know: 'When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

The indescribable gift of today being a divine child is not fully experienced by Christians, because the seeds of divine life will only reach their full growth in eternal life, when we see him "as he is", or as St Paul says somewhere, when we see Him 'face to face' (1 Cor 13:12).

We are created by God, and we are destined to return to God and to meet with him in direct sight. Then our life of grace and divine childhood achieves its full growth.

This 'seeing' is of course much more than perception with the eyes. It means full communion and participation. We can only talk about this destiny in our human words and using human metaphors, like eating with God at his table. An image of great intimacy and togetherness.

John says, 'we shall see Jesus as he is' - this is a fact in the mind of St John. And in order to be able to see him as he is, John argues, we can be assured that we will first be changed to be like Him. What a promise for us! A promise that sounds almost too great. What are we that God lifts us up to such heights!

Imagine an ant on the floor. Can he see you? Can he eat with you? Well, yes, to a certain extent. In my home ants eat much from me that I drop on the floor. But if the ant has to be able to see you as you are, in true communion, he has to become like you.

Can a human being see Jesus, the Son of God, and God, our Father? If we want to commune with God, we have to be, to a certain extent, like God. This is an amazing mystery. First he became like us to lift us up, and to fully lift us up, he makes us like He is.

We will never be equal to Christ – He sits forever on the divine throne and we bow down before Him. But like him, we will have glorified bodies, and sin will be gone forever. This makes it possible to look at him, and live. And to be with him, and to commune with the Triune God. Almost divine.

### 3 What should we do in the meantime?

Amazing, is it not? We are children of God and we look forward to being in eternity with Him, and to enjoy seeing Him and having communion with Him - as we already experience in a minimal but *real* way even today, especially as we celebrate Holy Eucharist.

But what to do with this knowledge? A proper response is not, in my view, to dive into eschatological dreams. Neither should we focus so much on that Kingdom that we will inherit, as we may then forget about living today.

John Stott says in the commentary I already mentioned: (*The Epistles of John* [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries] (Leicester, 1960, 1983). p. 120):

John's reason for writing about the return of Christ and our final state is not theological but ethical.

We are called by God to live life today to the full! He has not called us to escapism, but to service.

If we have this hope as children of God, to one day see Him as he is, and to be changed to be like Jesus, then we have to purify ourselves today, is the conclusion of John in 1 John 3:3

Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

One day we will be made fully pure, so today, we anticipate that complete makeover, by living as much as we can in alignment with that expected change. We try to be today what we will surely be in the future.

What does this mean, to purify oneself? It means living as God wants us to live.

Our model is Jesus Christ, 'as he is pure'; He is the One who has never sinned, the Righteous One; He is our model of holiness, as Jesus himself said: 'Learn from me'.

Josemaria Escriva, in *Friends of God*, p. 128, says:

We have to learn from him, from Jesus, who is our only model. If you want to go forward without stumbling or wandering off the path, then all you have to do is walk the road he walked, placing your feet in his footprints and entering into his humble and patient Heart, there to drink from the wellsprings of his commandments and of his love. In a word, you must identify yourself with Jesus Christ and try to become really and truly another Christ among your fellowmen.

In the part of the letter of John that we have read, he speaks of sin, breaking the law, lawlessness, and that we must make a clean break with that. We have to be righteous, just as He is righteous. We have read:

Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

This is what purify yourself means. It means: love others. And loving others is not in the first place a feeling, but action. This is what serving God is all about. Being a friend for others. Being a helper for others. Encourage your children, make the life of other people better.

### **Conclusion**

You are very important for God. You are his child, loved and cared for by the Father.

He also guarantees your glorious destiny - you are made for being with Him, yes even for being like him. What a great hope we have!

This identity and this destiny puts all our daily acts, in a new perspective. Is what we say and do compatible with us being children of God? Is it in harmony with our destiny of perfect love?

Sometimes it helps to be very concrete. Why not at home take some time to sit alone with pen and paper or with your iPad :)

First thank God that He is your Father, and that you have a great future... and then make a list of the concrete things you can do to express your love to your family, your friends, your neighbors. Let other people see by your practical expressions of love and care that you are a child of the loving and caring Father.

**+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**