

## Trinity 8

I take as my text today from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Salvation.”

What comes to mind when you think of “family”? Your immediate family? Or maybe your larger family that includes more distant relations? Perhaps, you might include close friends as part of your family.

But, there is another family: your Christian family, or on a more local and intimate scale, your Parish family.

Each day, I am reminded in many ways that we are a family. Not that we are siblings and the like in a biological manner; but we are family in a spiritual manner.

That spiritual family is more far-reaching than one might suppose, for it is an eternal family united with God as our Father.

You see, when we were baptized into Christ's Church and became Christians, we went through a spiritual rebirth and were made children of God through adoption. We were no longer orphans of sin because with our spiritual rebirth God became our Father and the Church our Mother, an eternal relationship.

In the passage we read today from his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul gives insight on this Christian concept of being God's adopted children. His inspiration, perhaps, coming from Roman law and the momentous impact that it had on an individual and the family into which he was being adopted.

There were four consequences of adoption under Roman law from which we may find parallels to our own adoption into Christ's Family.

First, the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained full rights in his new family, legally binding.

Second, the person became an heir to his new father, equal with any existing or future heirs: he was a co-heir.

Third, the previous life of the person was completely wiped out and he was considered a new person entering into a new life of which the past had no part.

And, fourth, the person was indisputably the legal son of his new father under the law.

An example of the Roman law of adoption to which we can relate is that of Nero, who was adopted by the Emperor Claudius so that he could succeed him as emperor, rather than his daughter Octavia.

Nero, to cement the relationship, wanted to marry Octavia but, under Roman law, even though Nero and Octavia were not blood relatives, the adoption made them brother and sister, thus preventing them from marrying. The Roman senate had to pass a special law permitting the marriage.

Now, perhaps, we can more clearly understand the significance of adoption in Paul's mind and how he viewed our adoption as children of God.

At one time, we were under the control of our sinful nature; that was our old life. But, when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour and underwent baptism, we were wiped clean of our past sins and made a new person under God's control, rather than Satan's control. Our old life was done away, and we entered into a new life.

With this new life as adopted children of God, we become heirs to his Heavenly Kingdom and joint heirs with Christ, God's only true Son.

When we became a Christian, we entered into God's Family, fully and completely, undeservedly through God's Grace, his Love, and his Mercy. Yes, undeservedly, for it is not something we can earn, only accept.

However, the proof of our acceptance of God's Grace is reflected in our lives; we become living examples of his Love.

By adoption, we have become rightful heirs as members of God's family, all of which is guaranteed by the witness of the Holy Spirit.

This means that we're all spiritually related. In the eyes of God, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and heirs to His Heavenly Kingdom.

We have entered into a special relationship with God, and each other, unlike that of any other religion.

This is indeed wonderful. We are a family!

We may not resemble each other in physical appearance but we do share the same love and worship of God: we resemble each other in a spiritual appearance.

In our Parish family, we share and participate in the same liturgical worship and share the same doctrine and faith.

In the broader Christian Family, of which we are members, we may not share the same manner of corporate worship and our definitions of doctrine may differ; yet, we are remain brothers and sisters in Christ.

But, in the everyday of life, the closeness of the Parish family becomes more and more important. We share in each other's joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams. One person's gain becomes our gain. One person's loss becomes our own loss.

This is more apparent and deeply felt when a member of the Parish enters the larger life and is no longer physically present with us. We mourn their absence while we share in that joyous moment, assured of the joy in heaven when one has passed through the veil and entered into the larger life, going from strength to strength, and growing in the knowledge and love of God.

Certainly, as Christians, we are members of a larger family, the Family in Christ. All encompassing as that Family in Christ might be, we, in our individual Parishes, share closer, more intimate relationships, not unlike earthly families. We become the immediate family.

That relationship is a most wonderful thing. The more we participate in that intimate Family in Christ relationship, the more rewarding it becomes.

It becomes a relationship that binds us together through our worship and sharing in the journey through life, the everyday-ness of life in Christ.

If we look around us, we can see, indeed, a family, coming together in the truest sense of adoption; we can see and feel our lives filled with the love that comes from God and sharing that love with each other.

Sometimes, we see in the human experience, the power of adoption where individual, very human love becomes the focus of a new, deep relationship. So it is with our spiritual adoption.

If we accept the terms of our spiritual adoption, we enter into a relationship, that is eternal, and dependent only upon our acceptance of God's Divine Love and Grace.

Be not mistaken. This new, wonderful relationship is not without cost. That is, this new relationship in Christ costs us our lives, in that we give them freely over to our Lord and Saviour to offer to God the Father as part of His Eternal Sacrifice. We become living sacrifices.

It all begins here. Here, where two or three come together. And those two or three become more and more as our little family grows and grows, for we have, in the words of St. Paul, "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father,"