

Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas
Diocese of Toledo Vespers on the eve of the Installation
Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 5:00 pm
Our Lady Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral

Reading: 1 John 3: 1a, 2

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us, in letting us be called the children of God! Yet that is what we are.”

This evening, on the eve of the installation of a new bishop, gathered as a diocesan family in Christ, together with family and friends from near and far, each of us is reminded by Saint John of a simple yet profound truth: we are children of God! Children of a Father who loves us, who nurtures us and who desires us one day to be united with Him in heaven.

Saint John reassures us we are God’s children *now*! What we will later be has not yet come to light. The implication of course is, if we take the time to realize we are his children, if we believe it in our hearts, minds and souls, if we live as faithful children of so loving a Father *now*, then, please God, we will one day be like him, for we shall see him as he is!

But how did we become his children? Was it something we did, something we accomplished, something we merited? No! We became his children when we were baptized into his Son, Jesus Christ. We became adopted sons and daughters of the Father, baptized into the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. So how we act does not win us his love. How we act is the response to his love. When we were confirmed, remember, we learned one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was “fear of the

Lord.” That “holy fear” is not being afraid of being beaten or reprimanded by our father, but it is a fear of displeasing the Father, because we know how much he loves us, and how much we truly want to love him in return!

This evening, each of us is invited to recognize that simple profound truth: “I am a child of God the Father.” And if any of you, like me, has had the blessing of having a loving father, you know how that love can define your life. We need only think of the child, whose father is teaching him how to swim. A boy is petrified to jump into the water, but his father in the pool extends his arms and invites his son: go ahead, jump, I will catch you! We need only think of the young girl, whose father is taking her to College, who reassures her with a warm hug and a word of encouragement, reminds her who she is, where she came from, and that no matter what happens, he will be there for her. We need only to think of the father who, even in a physically debilitated state, from his nursing home bed, strengthens his children by his example, comforts them from his suffering and inspires them with the strength that comes from sacrificial love.

This is the kind of Father we have! And our Father desires us daily to recognize and live in his Son Jesus. For this new bishop, who comes to stand in the person of the Father, to become the father of the family of faith in the Diocese of Toledo, this is a daunting task. I beg you, pray for me, that I myself may live as a child of the Father, a holy and ardent bishop, who loves you, nurtures you, and who desires one day to be united with you in heaven. With all my heart, I pledge to love you with every fiber

of my being, to hold you daily close in prayer, to teach, shepherd and sanctify as the Father would have me do in Jesus. Every good father loves his children unconditionally; so will I strive to love you. Every good father strives to love first by example and to protect his family from evil; so will I strive to love you. Every good father, even though his children stray, lets them know he is always there to welcome them home; so will I strive to love you.

If we take to heart, if we *really believe* we have a Father in heaven who loves us beyond our imagining, then such belief, such conviction, changes the way we see ourselves, others and the world. Believing in the Father's love enables us to truly live out our Baptism, to reform our own lives, to trust and to believe in Christ, His Gospel and the Church, and to become the radical disciples the Church and the world so desperately need. Living as authentic children of God can convert hearts and minds, transform a family, edify coworkers, rekindle the lukewarm and inspire schoolmates.

Being God's children *now* has three consequences, writes one commentator on this passage from Saint John: "Christians do not belong to the world, which failed to receive Jesus. Christians will lead lives of holiness like Christ. Christians are confident of an even greater salvation in the future" (JBC 991). Whatever our vocation, no matter our age, the discipleship we live will often be at odds with a world which would have the Church change to fit the world, a world which may well reject us because we choose to live Jesus. Whatever our vocation, we are called this

evening to recommit ourselves to lives of holiness, to live in Christ and for Christ each day. Whatever our vocation, we must never lose heart, but hope confidently in the glory of heaven promised to those who remain faithful.

As the new father of the family of faith, I promise our priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated men and women and lay faithful, to see each of you first as a child of God, created in his image and likeness, redeemed by the Son, living temples of the Holy Spirit. I pray you will see me in the same way.

In an Audience just last month with all the new bishops from around the world who were named within the last year, our Holy Father, Pope Francis exhorted them: “Nothing is more important than introducing people to God.” He urged them to begin with the young and the elderly, because, he said: “the first are our wings, and the second are our roots. Wings and roots without which we do not know what we are, much less where we are going.” My dear young friends and my dear older friends, your new bishop needs you to be his wings and his roots!

Pope Francis went on to invite the bishops to be sentinels to awaken their Churches. Listen to what he counseled: “Do not waste energy in conflict and disagreement, but rather use it to build and to love.” As your new bishop and father of this family of faith, I pledge to all of you that I will use my energy “to build and to love”!

This evening, each of us is reminded by Saint John of a simple yet profound truth: we are children of God! Children of a Father who loves us,

who nurtures us and who desires us one day to be united with Him in heaven. A Father who desires us to live in such a way that others would recognize that we are, not only in name, but in word and deed, His children in Christ Jesus.

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us, in letting us be called the children of God!

And *that* is what we are!”