

Rorate Coeli
18 December, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 1:19-28

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear baptized of Christ,

Who are you? You are the Redeemed of the Lord. You are sons and daughters of the Most High God, beloved children of your heavenly Father. You are saints. You are those robed in the righteousness of Christ. You are a holy nation, a royal priesthood. You are members of the one, holy, Christian, apostolic Church. You are a member of the body of Christ. Is that how you identify yourself? When people ask, “Who are you?”, is that how you respond? You should because that IS what you are, what God Himself has made you. Those are objective realities. They are not rooted in your passing emotions or shifting thoughts. Your Baptism, your adoption into the family of God, your rescue from the kingdom of Satan, is the root of your identity. It gives definition to everything else about you. Without it you are lost and left to try to figure out what and who you are. That is a terrible burden that is filled only with despair. People today try to define themselves in terms of where they work, their hobbies, their ancestors, their skin color, or their body parts. But those things only have any meaning in so far as they stem from your new birth of water and the Spirit.

Notice how John the Baptist responds when asked “Who are you?”. “I am NOT the Christ. I AM the voice of one crying in the wilderness ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’ I am the one who points you to the Christ.” John defined himself in his relationship to Christ. John was only what he was in relationship to Christ. God had appointed him from before the foundations of the world to be the forerunner of the world’s Savior. Everything about him God created to serve that purpose. Every strength, every weakness. That he was a man. That he was from a priestly family. The timing and location of his birth. All of these God set in order for the role that John played in the plan of salvation, your salvation, and his own. This, of course, gave John great comfort as he went about preaching. “God has made me what I am and appointed me to this task. Neither my time nor my body nor my mind nor my emotions nor my abilities are my personal possession to use for my own private desires and pleasures. God has appointed me to cry out ‘Repent. Be baptized. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’. Though I will be hated by some, rejected by many, yet this is who I am to the glory of God who made me. I am redeemed by the Blood of the very One whose sandals I am not worthy to untie and over whose head I will pour the waters of Baptism. I may be called to suffer the death of a martyr, but that belongs to the Lord. If He wills it, so be it. Amen.” The Pharisees may have been confused about who John was. John was definitely not and that was because he defined himself as God had made and defined him.

Each of you may take the same comfort in who God has made you. The world is filled with the devil's lies and attempts to confuse us. Don't listen to them. The world only knows how to lie about anything and everything because the world has the devil as its father, he who is the very father of lies, who can do nothing but lie because that is his very nature. If the world calls a thing good and right, you can be 100% sure that it is not. If those who are outside the Christian Church call a thing good, you can be 100% certain it is not and you need to run the opposite direction. If those inside the church agree with something world says, avoid them like the plague. They are liars and are only wolves masquerading as sheep. If your own thoughts say something different than what God has said in Holy Scripture, they are from your sinful flesh and you need to bring your thoughts captive to Christ. Drive those thoughts away and believe what God has spoken.

There is nothing the devil loves more than chaos and disorder because they are of death and lead to death. That is why he is constantly calling everything that God has said and done into question. "Did God really say?" It's not because he cares for you. It's because he wants to destroy you and drown you under chaos. He wants to unhinge you from reality, the beautiful reality of who God has made you. He wants you to question both your creation and your redemption. He is in the mouths of those who deny the Creator. He is in the mouths of those who deny the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. He is in the mouths of those who worship creation and would destroy man to "save the planet". He is in the mouths of those who deny that in the beginning God made man in His own image, male and female He created us. And when these certainties are taken from us we are left with nothing but uncertainty and despair because we are seeking definition and value and truth apart from the very One who is Truth, Who fashioned us and knit us together in the womb and Who then became man to redeem us, body and soul.

The devil wants you drowning in uncertainty and despair over who you are. But you don't need to. Just listen to the One who in love created you and in mercy, redeemed you from death. How does He define you? He defines you first in Christ - washed, cleansed, holy, His own dear child. Your whole being - mind, body, and soul - has been rescued from sin and death by the man Jesus Christ who gave His whole being over into death to reclaim you and to restore you to His own image. He has joined you to Himself. You have put on Christ. He has defined you and given you your identity. He has bestowed upon you His Name. He has made you an heir of His kingdom. He has made you - body and soul - new, a child of righteousness and He has created you for good works which He has prepared for you. Having rooted your identity first in Christ, then, and only then, can you understand the rest of you - your body, your abilities, your vocations, your weaknesses, and your crosses. See how the Father loves you! He does not leave you to the chaos of this world. His Word is your anchor that will hold you fast in the storm. What God has said and promised will never change. Your bodies will suffer illness and age. Your minds will be buffeted about by the madness. Your emotions will be daily roller coaster of joy and sorrow. The world will continue to seek to destroy the works of

God and call evil good. Don't put your trust in any of those things. They are like shifting sands. Hear what God the Lord speaks. His Word endures forever.

Children of God, you are not defined by your afflictions any more than John the Baptist was defined by the prison in which he sat or the doubts that he suffered. Through all those things, the devil certainly sought to challenge the promises of God and cause John to doubt who he was, who God said he was. But those are lies. Neither your sins nor your physical or mental afflictions define you. Who you are is rooted in who God has made you and declared you to be. Trust neither your flesh nor the world to tell you who you are. They are liars. Trust your heavenly Father who loves you. Who created you. Who numbered your days and the hairs on your head. Who made you and who redeemed you. Who washed and sanctified you in the Blood of His Son. Who has poured the Holy Spirit into your hearts that you might declare with all boldness and confidence "I am not the Christ. I am not God. But I am a child of God. I am Baptized. My life is the life He has given and my whole body, mind, and soul, my strengths and abilities, my crosses and my afflictions all serve to His glory and my salvation." God knows exactly who you are. He made you. Trust His Word and rejoice in the wonderful thing that He has created and redeemed.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.