

## 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time + 14 July 2024 + Eph 1:3-14

A few years ago, a beautiful, short documentary was released called *I Lived on Parker Ave.* You may have heard about it or seen it on EWTN. If you have never seen it, I really encourage you to watch it. The story follows a young man as he travels from Louisiana to Indiana to meet his birth parents for the first time. His main goal for the reunion was simple: he wanted to thank them for allowing him to be born. You see, this young man's birth mother was on the table at an abortion center on Parker Avenue when at the last minute, she ran out. She couldn't get the words of a woman praying in front of the mill out of her mind when she told her: *your baby has ten fingers and ten toes.* And so this young, scared mother courageously chose life. And now this life has a name: David.

David's birth parents gave him life. But at age 18 and unmarried, they knew that they were not able to offer him what he needed to grow up healthy and whole. And so in their place came Jim and Susan—his adoptive parents. Now I'm not adopted, but you can tell through the documentary that Jim and Susan are truly phenomenal people. While he was grateful to his birth parents, David tells everyone that his real family is with his adoptive parents: those whom he calls *mom and dad.* These generous souls have given David an identity, and a place to call 'home'. I don't think most of us can imagine how much this must mean to David. It means that he is not alone—that he belongs to a family of love.

I mention all of this because David's story came to my mind as I considered our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading today from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It's quite wordy, so let's break it down a little. First, he says: *In love [the Father] destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.* In other words, out of His love for us, God the Father has adopted us to Himself. We are not gods. We are created beings, so we are not God's "children" by nature, strictly speaking.<sup>1</sup> But by the grace of His favor toward us, God has chosen to adopt us as own sons and daughters. And this means that we are not alone. We have an identity. And we have a 'home'—a place of safety, of peace, and love.

Again, we cannot take this for granted. So many children today grow up in broken homes. They have no sense of security, no firm identity, no place where they know they are loved for who they are, no matter what. Make no mistake about it, this wound in family life is the root cause of our society's biggest problems. Our society tries so hard in a well-meaning but misguided attempt to tackle the *symptoms* of dysfunction, but we refuse to face the *source.* In fact, some think that death is a better option than living in this world. We have a society of orphans: alone in the world, scared, and without knowing love. It's a story that is as old as original sin. And it's from this misery that the Father sent His Son to save us.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Hardon's Course on Grace, Part 2, Ch. XI "Sanctifying Grace"

How so? By welcoming us into His ‘family’, so to speak—the communion of love that is the Most Holy Trinity. When we are baptized, we are baptized into this family, we receive the family name. That’s why it is required for the minister of baptism to use the exact name of the family: *I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. And a name means a family identity. It is personal, but it is also part of a greater whole. When we are part of a family, we know where we belong, we know where home is. And only when we feel safe at home, are we free to grow, to wonder, and above all, to love. In this divine family, we have a Father in heaven who is watching over us and loving us at every moment.

Without this secure sense of identity, we feel orphaned in the world. In *I Lived on Parker Ave*, David’s birth mother asks him if he was angry with her for almost aborting him. His answer is powerful. He says: *no, never. But I did at times growing up think, ‘I wonder if they are thinking about me?’ I wonder if they are thinking about me*. It seems to me that this is another core need of the human person. Not just to have an identity, but to be *known*. I think this need to be known is also largely the source of our society’s unhealthy obsession with social media. That is, the need to check my phone every minute, to see if someone is thinking about me—has texted me, is following me on twitter, liked my post, and so on.

Underneath it all is our greatest fear: if no one is thinking about me, I am alone, forgotten. It’s as if I don’t even exist. And then people fall into sensual sins to feel more alive and to feel less alone; and these sins quickly become addictions. It’s a vicious, heartbreaking cycle, that can only be overcome ultimately by knowing you have a loving Father, receiving His mercy (for God can forgive *any* sin), and then choosing to stay in His house through faith and obedience. Basically, living by faith—faith that I am known. That I am loved.

St. Paul goes on to say that the *Father chose us in him, before the foundation of the world*. The Father *chose us*, specifically, individually, to be His own. As Pope Benedict XVI once said so beautifully: *We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary*. We are thought of. We are desired. The Father is always loving of us. And once we receive this love, we must share it! If we are to truly live up to the name ‘Christian,’ we must be a family who reaches out to those who feel forgotten, to let them know that they are remembered, and that they have value and dignity as the Father’s beloved children.

And so St. Paul concludes, *in [Christ] we were also chosen...so that we might exist for the praise of his glory*. The good news is that not only do we have a family, a home, and an identity, but we also have a purpose: *we exist for the praise of his glory*. Our value does not come from *what* we accomplish. Our value comes from *who* we are: beloved sons and daughters of our adoptive heavenly Father, redeemed brothers and sisters of Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit of their love, all for the praise of God’s glory.