

1 John 3:1-7

The Ugly Duckling, a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, written in the mid-nineteenth century, tells of a swan egg that somehow gets into a nest full of duck eggs. When the chicks all emerge, the swan chick is the odd one out. It is unlike the others. It's clumsy, ruffled, and...well, compared to the ducklings...it's ugly. And it's picked on. The father duck is angry at the mother duck for producing such an ugly duckling. All the normal ducklings hate it and drive it away. This ugly duckling despairs of life itself and just wants to die. Unwanted, unloved, it sees no future, no life for itself. One day the ugly duckling hears something up in the sky. Looking up it sees beautiful white swans flying overhead. And, of course, this little ugly duckling wishes it could be such a beautiful creature, but it knows it could never be. As the story unfolds, and the ugly duckling grows, becoming older, one day it notices its reflection in a pool of water, and it is amazed. It is not an ugly duckling. It's not even a duck. It's a swan, now full of beauty, with wings strong and vibrant. Hearing the swans up in the sky again, it flies up to join them and the swans welcome the ugly duckling, which is ugly no more, nor even a duck, but is one of them. And this beautiful swan lives with all the other swans happily ever after.

“The reason why the world does not know us,” writes St. John in our text, *“is that it did not know (Jesus).”* Because we're not ducks; we're swans. But the world only knows its own kind. It does not welcome Christ Jesus, and so it does not welcome those who are of Christ. In the eyes of the evil world, those who are of God are ugly ducklings.

This is how the world saw Jesus. The world hated Him. It rejected Him, wanting no part of Him. And it murdered Him, putting Him on a cross to die. But Jesus rose from the dead on the third day having His same flesh and blood body, yet now it is glorified. And this is what awaits us even though now we are but ugly ducklings.

I say this because it's so easy to believe what the evil world tells us. The devil lies to us through the sinful world around us. And as progressive liberals know, tell a lie often enough and people will believe it. And so we see ourselves as the odd one out. “I'm the clumsy one; the ruffled one. The people around me in the world have it together. But me? I don't fit in because I'm an ugly duckling.”

Enough of this! Listen to Jesus' apostle: *“Beloved, we are God's children...See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and so we are!”* Look at your reflection. Go to the water of baptism and look. That's you! You are no ugly duckling. You are a beautiful white swan. You are God's child declared to be holy and innocent through the blood of Christ that has washed you.

See the swans flying overhead. See them with eyes of faith. The saints who have gone before us are now in heaven with Christ. They know who they are. They no longer hear the lies of the devil; the lies of the evil world. They are not yet glorified, for their bodies lie here in the ground. But their souls are with Christ, and they have joy; they are at peace.

We long for that. We want to join the saints triumphant; the swans flying in the sky. But we must wait on the Lord. And for now our place is here with all the ducks. They irritate us. They pick on

us. Some days the ducks make us feel worthless. And what they say always has a kernel of truth to it. They point out our sins. They hit our weak points. How could God love us and accept us when we feel so unloved and unwelcome in the evil world?

But we live by faith, my friends; faith in God's assuring words. "*Beloved, we are God's children now.*" Not later. Not one day in the future. Now! Right now you are God's child. But you must look, and keep looking at your reflection in the water of baptism. Walk away from your baptism; ignore it, forget about it, and you will not only believe the devil's lies that you are an ugly duckling; you will live like an ugly duckling. Sin will grab you and dwell within you. You will make a practice of sinning. You will not try to prevent sin from mastering you. And no one, says St. John, who lives in this way abides in God.

This is how the ducks live. You don't find them eager to hear and read God's words. You don't see them hungering for forgiveness; the forgiveness God gives us in the words of absolution, in the Holy Sacraments. The world is not of God, and so it cares nothing for the holy things of God. Ducks may appear to keep the Ten Commandments, but their motivation is not the love of Jesus in their heart.

But it is for you because you are God's child. You are bought and paid for by the blood of your Savior. You are a sinner, like me, but sin does not master you. You don't want to offend your loving God by sinning. And when you do, you repent and seek forgiveness, and it's yours. Look always at your reflection in the water of baptism. You, dear swan, are perfectly white, for you are forgiven in Christ.

"*What we will be,*" writes St. John, "*has not yet appeared; but we know that when (Jesus) appears, we shall be like Him.*" The ugly duckling had no real reason to be sad and troubled. It had no reason to despair of its future life. Because it was already a swan, everything would be wonderful in the end.

And also for you. Because you are God's child in Jesus, you have no reason to be sad and troubled now; no reason to fear the future. Jesus made sure of this. He rose from the dead with a glorious body, and you, says St. John, will be like Him.

Let the ducks walk all over you now if this must be. You will soar with the swans one day. And believing this, your spirit can soar right now. You live among the ducks, but your real home is above. And you, dear beautiful swan, dear child of God, will have a body that will be like Christ's: glorious in every way. And you, with all the saints triumphant, will soar and live in heaven with Jesus happily ever after. Amen.