

November 1, All Saints Day (1 John 3:1-3)

## **“Children of God” is a name we do not earn and do not work for.**

by [Margarita Solis-Deal](#) in the [November 2023](#) issue

I have a last name that is often mispronounced. *Solis*—should be quite simple. In places like Guanajuato, Mexico, where my father was born, the name is popular. However, in the midwestern town where I grew up, the name was often pronounced as not “soh-lees” but instead “soh-less.” Easy error, I thought. Many times, I would let it go instead of correcting someone who didn’t know any better. No big deal, I thought—until the day my father heard someone calling me Margarita “Soh-less.”

I believe what disturbed him more than the mispronunciation was the fact that he saw little reaction from me or any attempt to correct the poor soul. “Our last name is pronounced ‘Soh-lees,’” he firmly said to the wide-eyed person. I knew by the tone of my father’s voice that I was about to learn a great lesson. He was proud of his name and of the people in his family and lineage who carried it. He wanted me to know what an honor it was to bear the name Solis and the values and expectations that came along with it. The name Solis was a privilege and had an ancestral lineage in which I belong.

I did not earn the name or work for it. I was given the name out of the mere fact that I was born to a father who carried it. The name represented a lineage that included a faith-filled people who loved and served God and loved their community of family and neighbors. The name Solis was woven in a Mexican culture rich with ritual and tradition, a culture that my father knew and loved. I think he held the belief that if he could preserve the pronunciation of the name, then perhaps his children one day would embrace the beauty that was rooted in this heritage that was ours to discover. He knew that the name Solis was significant and that to be a Solis was a status of which to be proud.

In our small Midwest town, however, the name Solis was strange. The brown shades of our skin that came with the name announced that we were different. Sometimes

our name raised people's eyebrows and heightened their feelings of distrust and disdain. Code-switching to "soh-less" became a safety strategy. Declining to correct others helped us stay under the radar.

I think of this as I read today's scripture from John. Because of God's endless love for all of us, God calls us "children of God"—and "that is what we are." God loves us, and the expression of that love is to be called God's children. I did not earn it and I did not work for it; I am a child of God out of the sheer fact that God loves me. Perhaps, like my father, God desires that I never lose the pronunciation of "child of God" in hopes that I will someday discover the eternal beauty that is rooted in the name.

It is only fitting on All Saints' Day that we explore what it means to share the name "children of God." In the Catholic Church, the Easter vigil includes a beautiful ritual of singing the litany of saints. Names of holy men and women are recited, and we ask them to pray for us. It is moving to hear the inclusion of so many in the full litany. I think about the names recited and wonder about their lives, their service, and even more so their steadfast belief that they were truly children of God. A belief so strong that they would dedicate their lives to defending that name.

It is always striking to read the lives of those we recognize as saints. Their stories tell of their great faith and describe the deep sufferings they often endured as a result. I am not sure I have read about any saint who did not suffer greatly. I think my father corrected people who mispronounced his name because he knew what his name represented. Perhaps this is what the many saints who have gone before us deeply internalized: they understood what God's name represented and would defend it to the end of their lives, at times even at the expense of their lives. God's name for us, children of God, is a name that is to be embraced with deep sacredness. God gives this name to all of us. It connects us all under one name.