

Who likes animated movies? It's ok to put your hand up, we all do deep down inside! One of my favorites is Disney's the Lion King. The story is great, the music is amazing and the humor is hilarious. In recent years however, one scene in particular has stood out to me. For those of you have not seen the Lion King, the plot centers around a young lion named Simba, who has been running away from his identity as the rightful king of his home, pride rock. His uncle Scar at one point causes a wildebeest stampede which ends up killing Simba's father, Mufasa, who dies after saving Simba. Scar blames Simba as he mourns his father's death, manipulating the truth so that Simba runs in fear, leaving Scar to rule Pride Rock. Simba soon finds friends who care for him and lives an easy life full of no worries called Hakuna Matata. Despite this, Simba knows he is avoiding his identity.

Ok here's the scene: Many years later, an old friend of Simba's father who is a baboon named Rafiki, finds him and says he can show him his father. Leading Simba to a pool of water, he invites Simba to look into it, where he sees his reflection and is disappointed. Rafiki asks him to look harder, telling Simba his father lives within him. In a dramatic way, Mufasa suddenly appears to Simba reminding him he's forgotten who he is, with the words "Remember who you are". When Simba realizes he's been running away from his identity, he returns to Pride Rock and wins the day. If you have not seen the film, I highly encourage you to do so or YouTube the scene after mass.

Besides having a movie night idea for the week, what does this scene from the Lion King have to do with today's readings? While St. Paul is neither a Lion nor has been the subject of a Disney movie, he echoes these words of remembering who we are. Our second reading presents a dense, yet spiritually rich hymn to Jesus and God the Father. While there are many themes presented, one sticks out in particular, **Baptism**. While it's not explicitly mentioned by name in this hymn, two sentences stick out that strongly suggest Baptism "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... as He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him". This is the first sentence and the second is "In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will..."

Looking at the first sentence we hear that Father has chosen us in Jesus before the foundation of the world. St. Paul reminds us that were not an accident. In the creation account from Genesis, man and woman are made to share in God's own life. They are given a unique relationship with Him, share in His care for creation and are blessed as a couple to love each other deeply and intimately. There is no need for proving their worth or having to attain a status, they knew who they were-*A beloved son and precious daughter of the Father*. Not only does St. Paul remind us of this, but emphasizes it saying we were chosen "before the foundation of the world". What does this mean? He is saying you and I were seen by the father before anything came to be. This means before our birth, before the earth became livable and even before the Big Bang, (slow) *God desired all of us*. He chose each and every one of us by name, to receive His joy, blessings and happiness. This identity is free from trying to prove our self-worth, because in the eyes of the Father, **we are priceless**. This is what it means to be a beloved son or precious daughter.

Earlier I mentioned how Simba's uncle Scar distorted the truth to make him flee from his identity. Like Simba, we have had the truth of our identity distorted, making us forget who we are. The creation account reminds us that Adam and Eve forgot their identity. They believed a lie that said 'Your identity as beloved son and precious daughter isn't enough; you will only be happy if you do what God asked you not to do. He's holding out on you and doesn't care about your happiness. Go ahead, prove yourself'. Sound familiar? This is what happens with sin. We believe the lie that we will be happy enough, accepted and loved if we do certain things. This is where we create masks and false identities that cover the wounds, fears and shame we experience. Instead of resting in our identity as beloved son or precious daughter, we try to make an identity for ourselves and it is exhausting isn't it? Like Simba, we want the life of Hakuna Matata, to live with no worries, but the more we seek to live it the less fulfilled we become.

But there is Good News! St. Paul reminds us of the gift we have in Jesus. Our second sentence is "He (Father) destined us for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ". What is he saying here? This

adoption in Jesus does something new to our original identity. *Jesus takes His Own identity as The Beloved Son of The Father and offers it to us* How does this happen? (PAUSE) Let me read the account of Jesus' Baptism from Luke's Gospel "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son, whom I love; with you I am delighted". This is what Baptism is; we inherit those same words of the Father at our Baptism which are repeated every day our lives! "*You are my beloved son/precious daughter in whom I delight*"! This heals our wounds and shatters the lies that we aren't good enough or need to prove ourselves to others. OUR IDENTITY IS NOT IN WHAT WE DO, BUT WHO WE ARE-beloved sons and precious daughters.

Pretty cool how Disney and Scripture come together huh? But the reality is like Simba, we need to fight for our identity. As he returned home confronting his fears and uncle's lies, we have wounds needing to be healed, lies that need confronting and harmful actions that need to cease. This is a real battle, because Satan hates our identity and tells those same lies from Genesis in different words, but with the same evil intention-to rob our identity. We need to constantly remind ourselves who we are, but fortunately, there is an easy way to do this. Every time we bless ourselves with Holy Water, we can say those words of the Father to ourselves "You are my beloved son/precious daughter in whom I am well pleased"! This simple action will help us grow in our identity and help us recall who we are. The path to reclaiming and living our identity will rough, but like Mufasa who reminded Simba who he was, our Father will never stop loving and reminding us of our identity because we are worth it. Remember who you are!