

Accepting the Kingdom of God as a Child

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mk 10:2-16

Ave Maria Catholic Church, October 3, 2021 - Fr. David M Vidal

What a beautiful passage of the gospel, not only for the description of the meaning of marriage, but also for the encounter of Jesus with the children: People were bringing children to Jesus, and He welcomed them.

How contrasting the action of Jesus is with the apostles' reaction: where the apostles find disturbance, Jesus finds a lesson. And this is the lesson of life that Jesus offers: *"Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it. Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them,"* (Mc 13-16).

Let us try to understand Jesus's lesson. What is he telling the apostles? What is he telling us?

Obviously, maturity is not evil. Physical and spiritual maturity are expected and desired. We need to grow, and growth brings goodness to our lives. Saint Paul speaks about this natural growth in his first letter to the Corinthians: *"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways,"* (1 Cor. 12: 31).

There are certain aspects proper to childhood that we must leave behind. Good thinking requires education. Good reasoning requires formation. Speaking with eloquence requires time and effort. With the help of parents and educators, children form their intellects and learn to judge according to good principles. With good formation, children learn that the simple "I like it" or the "I do not like it" are not the highest standards of life. Good thinking helps us to discover what is true, beautiful, and good, and to judge everything according to these highest ideals.

In order to be mature, we must not only leave behind poor thinking, but also weak desires. The lack of constancy and determination are defects proper to the early stages of life. But then, we learn the spirit of discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance that lead us to maturity. We do not do things only because they are "fun" to do and leave things undone because they are "boring." The mature person acts according to higher standards: we do things because they are good and because they bring goodness to our lives and to the lives of those around us; and we avoid things that are evil and shameful.

When Jesus presents children as an example to follow, it is not because of the defects proper to childhood. Knowing that, St Paul tells us: *"Do not become children in sense. But in malice be children; and in sense be perfect,"* (1 Cor. 14:20).

We all are called to have the good qualities of children, without having the defects proper to the early age that shouldn't be in the mature person. That is why, St Paul insists: "*When I became a man, I gave up childish ways,*" (1 Cor. 12: 31).

Which ones are the good qualities of children that we must imitate? I would like to highlight three good qualities that, generally speaking, are present in childhood among many others: 1. Lack of duplicity, 2. Sense of littleness, 3. Sense of trust.

First, in children there is simplicity or absence of duplicity. In a child, we do not find that sophistication proper to adults who say things, but in truth say nothing. A child most probably will speak his mind and express what he desires without fear. In a sense, a child will show himself as he is.

Second, a child is aware of his littleness, and acknowledges that he depends on his parents. This awareness of his own weakness is the seed of humility that leads the child to practice greater virtues, such as faith, hope, and love.

Third, in a child there is a sense of trust. In children, there is a reverential love for those who care for them and those who love them. This reverential love leads them to true confidence.

For all these reasons, when Jesus placed a little child in the midst of his apostles He said: "*Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven,*" (Mt. 18:3).

We are called to be children of God

The child of God is, first of all, simple and upright, without duplicity; the child of God excludes hypocrisy and falsehood from his life. Our Lord declares in the Sermon on the Mount: "*If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light*" (Matt. 6:22) that is to say, if you are honest, if your intention is upright, your whole life will be illumined.

The child of God is aware of his weakness and need; he constantly recalls that God our Father freely created him out of nothing, and that without God's grace he can do absolutely nothing. If the child of God grows in humility, he will have an ever-deeper faith in the divine word, greater even than little children have in the words of their parents. He will truly live by the mysteries of salvation; he will contemplate those mysteries with admiration.

The child of God trusts in God, who is the Good Father providing for his needs. Jesus wants us to have this sense of trust when He teaches us the "Our Father." St Therese of the Child

Jesus used to say: “The arms of the Lord [Jesus] are like a divine elevator that lifts us up to God [the Father].”

Today, we heard in the Gospel: “*Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.*” As children of God, we must rid ourselves of duplicity, we must be aware of our littleness, and we must trust in His providential care. Then, and only then, we will be able to run towards Jesus, and He will embrace us and give us his blessing, Amen.