

Homily: Sept 19, 2021

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We celebrate God who wants this present world of ours to become like heaven. That's what we frequently pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." ("Venga a nosotros tu reino, Hagase tu voluntad, en la tierra como en el cielo.") Today Jesus shows us what kind of people we must be so that our earth may become the kingdom of God. Often times, our own egoistic ambition gets in the way, and so we call upon our God of compassion.

Jesus caught his own disciples stuck in an ordinary and very common human dynamic, namely being ambitious to be great and trying to determine who is the greatest. St. James stated clearly in our second reading that ambition leads to disorder and every kind of wickedness. Jesus knew, too, that wanting to be the greatest creates the dynamics of having to protect one's special great status; comparing and competing; looking down on others and knocking down those who threaten one's great position. Threatening good people is what we heard described very well in the first reading. The end result of ambition is a world we would call and experience as "hell."

Part of hell is feeling fear. So, Jesus' disciples, who were arguing about who was the greatest, were afraid to ask Jesus any questions when he said that he would suffer and be killed. And when Jesus asked them what they were arguing about along the way, they were afraid to answer his question. Therefore, Jesus proposed something else—something much better. Putting a child in their midst, Jesus invited his disciples to realize that welcoming a child is the same as welcoming him and welcoming God who sent him. Jesus wanted his disciples, and now us, to understand that when we welcome God, we simultaneously welcome God's world—called the Kingdom of God. We will want to do what God wants for this world. God wants us and all people to focus only on loving and serving. Then we will transform our world into a place of true happiness, peace and unity.

In the following chapter of today's Gospel, Jesus revealed that such a wonderful world, the kingdom of God, belongs to children. So Jesus said, unless we become like children, we can't enter the Kingdom of God. What might Jesus have meant with "become like children." Rather than being afraid to ask questions and answer them, children usually ask lots of questions. Children are eager beginners/learners. They often speak honestly and openly. They know they have to rely on others, like their parents, grandparents, other siblings and classmates. Little kids usually are easy to invite to help. They feel great when they can help set the table, or when they can bring a glass of water to Grandma, who said she's thirsty.

Various experts have studied the helpfulness of little children around one and one-half to two years of age. One study concluded that "young children seem to get enjoyment out of seeing others get help. When possible, they will try to help themselves, but it seems to be enough that someone helps. From these studies alone, it is not clear whether this desire to help is innate, or whether children learn this helpfulness from observing others in their first two years of life." I believe children help for both reasons. They (WE) were created in the image of God who is lovingly helpful and therefore we have that helpful spirit in us. So when children (we) see and actually help others, it feels right and feels like the best thing we can do.

Jesus' method and model for helping his disciples and us grow into the best version of our self was not through ambition, competition and feeling the pride of being better than others. Rather Jesus affirmed and blessed little children. Jesus promoted examples of people like the good Samaritan, who

helped a half-dead stranger. Jesus invited people to give others a cup of water, to feed a hungry person, to visit and even free those in prison.

Jesus continues to teach us, his modern-day disciples, through parables and various examples, how we are to serve. But his teaching will be as if falling on deaf ears if we aren't eager learners, like little kids, who are all ears and eyes, with mouths full of questions.

That's why Jesus said, "Welcome the children. . . . Become like children, for theirs is the Kingdom of God." In other words, become once again like the good little helpful child you and I were born to be—were meant to be.