

God with Us

Again this year, we came together to listen to the children present the Christmas story. That is something we never grow tired of hearing! There is something inexpressibly precious about hearing the good tidings of great joy brought to us in the voices of our children.

The gospel is God's gift to us of eternal life in Christ. Our children are God's gifts to us. When we teach the gospel to our children God joins us to them in a bond stronger than blood. He unites us in the common confession of the one true faith that receives eternal life. God binds us together forever. Our children are God's children.

God gives us children. But they aren't own possessions. They belong to Him. When we bring our children to God in Holy Baptism, we are not only confessing that we believe that God adopts us as His children in this spiritual washing, but we are also confessing that our baptised children belong to God. They bear the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. They are heirs of God's promises. They are Christians.

Jesus says in Matthew 18:1-5 that we must be converted and become like little children, or we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Why? Is it because children are so innocent? But they're not! Jesus also said that which is "*born of the sinful human nature is sinful human nature*" (John 3:6). Children don't need to be taught how to sin. They are born sinful. They believe that the world exists to serve them. It's cute for a while until we see it for what it is.

Why then does Jesus say we must be converted and become like little children, or we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven? Is it because their faith is purer than the faith of an adult? I don't doubt that it is, but if our faith must be pure and free from any doubt at all I wonder if anyone over the age of six can be saved! It is true that little children believe with a more implicit confidence than we have as we grow older and become so smart that we think we know better than God knows.

Our Lord is not talking specifically about the faith of a little child when He says that we must become like little children in order to get to heaven. Consider the question Jesus was answering when He said these words. The disciples had asked Him who was greatest in the kingdom of God. In response to that question Jesus set a child in the midst of them. He pointed to the child and said to be like him. Humble yourself as a little child.

Even in our day, when children often lack proper discipline and make themselves the centre of attention when they should be respectfully silent, children don't have the status of an adult. We don't let them drive or vote. We set down rules about what they will wear, eat, and drink. They are minors. And we try to teach them to submit to parental authority so that they will learn to get along in this world. We look at families in which the children have their parents under their control, and we pity the poor parents.

Who among adults wants the status of a child? But that's what Jesus wants for us! He's not telling us to think or act as a little child would think or act. He's telling us to accept the status a little child has: to become small and powerless and without any real status at all. When we humble ourselves before God and one another and become like little children, whom do we see? We see the little Child of all little children. We see the little Child born of Mary. We see the almighty Son of the Father given to us as the helpless Child of Mary. We see our God with us. And look! He's with our children! He's in their voices. He's in the words we hear them speak to us. He's in their singing of the ancient hymns and carols of the Church.

He, who has joined Himself to us as a little Child, remains with us and with our children even today. He is God. He is our God. He is with us. He is with our children. He grew to manhood in innocence. He was pure and free from all sin. On the cross, in His innocence He bore our sin. His pure, holy, and spotless life was offered to heaven in the place of our sinful, prideful, and corrupt lives. God remained with us as Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim forgiveness of sins to the whole world. God was with us as He established His holy Christian Church on this earth and gave to her the pure gospel and sacraments in which and through which God is with us until the end of time. God is with us and our children.

Humble yourselves before your Creator today. Bow down before Him whom the sea and wind obey. See Him lying in a manger, a little Child. Find in that Child the greatness you need, for He is God with us.