

Homily 14th Sunday of OT Year A Mt 11:25-30

You know how we're impressed by kid geniuses or child prodigies who display adult skills long before adulthood? Well in the gospel today, Jesus suggests that it would also be impressive for adults, who fancy themselves among the wise and the learned, to take on the qualities of little ones.

'Little ones' is often translated 'the childlike', and Jesus makes other key references to children in the gospels. "Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

That Jesus says things like this several times, in several different gospels, affirms their authenticity, and it means we should take the point extra seriously. So what is it about children we should emulate, with the hope God will more clearly reveal His mysteries TO us, instead of hiding them FROM us?

Well, Jesus is not talking about a reversion to childishness. He desires not a relapse into temper tantrums, selfishness, ignorance, or irresponsibility, but a recovery of a childlike approach to life.

He wants genuine joy for living: jumping up and down over ice cream or pizza, laughing at our own silliness, or someone else's, gazing with wonder at creation – a waterfall rushing over a rocky ledge, a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, a shooting star streaking across the midnight sky.

But even more importantly, He wants a willingness to believe the unbelievable, a mind un-muddled by prejudice and pessimism, an unashamed dependence on someone other than oneself.

Is it even possible for us 'wise and learned' to become like little ones? Of course it is ... and there's no need to check our brain at the door either. We'll need that to carry out our daily duties ... but those duties can still be achieved with the heart of a child.

'Little' and 'learned' can be as complementary in us, as faith and reason are supposed to be. We've all seen the heart of a child in the smiles of smart and educated people – Popes John Paul, Benedict and Francis, Mother Theresa, Cardinal Timothy Dolan. And it's not just genetic. It comes from the simple joy of accepting the things God has revealed to them, and living their lives accordingly.

But there is a risk ... that wisdom and learning can make one cynical, arrogant, and OCD on self-reliance. The last is perhaps the biggest danger: the desire for total control over one's life, and the pursuit to attain it.

We have to be willing to give that up, in order to let God in ... to set aside the yoke we've made for ourselves, take on the yoke of Jesus, and trust that it's the best way, to plow through our lives.

For the Jewish people, the image of the yoke symbolized the Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament, or the Law of God. The yoke of Jesus is the Law of Love. It's easy **not because** it requires little effort, allows laxity in the moral life, or is free from challenges.

It's easy because despite its challenges, it eases the minds and hearts of those who submit to its guidance. They know peace and joy, because they're achieving what they were made for: loving communion with God and each other.

On the other hand, those who cling to their own yoke, strive for what the world wants them to be, and grow weary from internal conflict – seeking one thing, while being made for something else. Theirs is a burden, by no means light, and without the yoke of Jesus, there's no relief for their plight.

Little children are more than happy, most of the time, to be yoked to their parents, with faith and trust they will be led or nudged in the right direction, cared for, loved, kept safe and secure. Jesus would like us to join ourselves to Him with the same confidence and enthusiasm.

Many of you are blessed or have been blessed with little ones in your lives. So when you see kids playing without a care in the world ... when you notice their wide-eyed excitement as you read them a story, be reminded to cultivate their qualities in you.

Then take your childlike self to prayer, and reread or reflect on the story of our salvation. Ask God to more clearly reveal those mysteries to you, His beloved little ones. Be open to HIS writing for you, the story of the rest of your life ... knowing it ends with your soul at ease ... free from all labor, no burdens to bear ... His eternal heavenly guest.