

Rev. Derek Fairman

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Innocence)

In the Gospel reading, the little children come to the Lord Jesus. He is not opposed to the children, nor the way that they come into the world, but rather He blesses the children. The disciples were probably opposed to the children coming to the Lord Jesus because they thought that somehow His spending time with children would be seen as making His teachings unserious. The disciples thought that the children would not be able to grasp what the Lord was teaching, and thus the children would not make good disciples. The Lord Jesus taught them otherwise.

To be sure, children need to be taught according to their level of understanding, but children have made good disciples of the Lord Jesus. One example is St. Agnes, a girl of 12 who died for her faith in the Lord Jesus. St. Maria Goretti died for chastity. The Lord Jesus has not excluded the role of children in the Church, but rather made the innocence of children an important lesson to be learned by all.

The innocence and trust of children takes us back to the beginning, back to a time before sin came to misalign so many things. There is a delay in the way in which sin manifests itself. For those who are baptized, concupiscence, or an inclination to sin, remains after Baptism, but even so there is a delay in the way in which this weakness or inclination to sin manifests itself. There is a way in which children remind us of how things used to be at the beginning.

We remember that the Virgin Mary is the New Eve. Another reason that the Virgin Mary is the New Eve relates to her innocence. The Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin. Her soul was redeemed by the blood of her Son. Her soul was not exactly as Eve's soul had been at the beginning, because she would have received original sin if not for God's intervention. Yet Mary's Immaculate Conception harkens back to Eve, back to the Garden of Eden. Just as children take us back to Eden, in a way, so does the Blessed Virgin.

Throughout her life, she had a dutiful fear of the Lord, and served the Lord as His handmaid. Unlike Eve, who disobeyed the Lord by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Virgin Mary overcame every temptation to disobey God's orders. Even when the angel came to her to announce that she would be the Mother of God, when she likely understood the enormity of what God was asking of her, and there were so many unknowns, she still trusted that the Lord would help her. Not only did she retain the grace that God gave her, she allowed it to grow more powerfully in her soul.

Throughout her life, the Blessed Virgin grew in her innocence and simplicity. We might see people's innocence fade away as they get older, although not always. With the Blessed Virgin, as she continued to be in her Son's divine presence, her heart only grew in her devotion to Him, and her heart was not divided. She retained a simplicity by being in His presence, and she maintained her sense of wonder and astonishment that children often have. She grew in knowledge and wisdom, but not in the worldly wisdom that comes with sin and false values. This simplicity came into her life and brought her to the Cross. Despite everything, she trusted in her Son's promise to rise again, which He did.

What about us? Maybe there are times in our own lives whenever we wished that things would be simpler, when we could go back to a time before things became complicated and misaligned. We cannot exactly just reverse time and do that, but there are ways in which we can find simplicity and trust, and let go of so many things that have led us away from God.

Prayer is an important part of doing so. Whenever we pray, we connect with the Lord, who is there to help us, to listen to whatever is happening in our lives that causes us stress and leads us away from Him. If we do not pray, then we might have the tendency to try to deal with those things on our own, and that is difficult. The children came to the Lord Jesus, and we need to come to the Lord Jesus in our prayers.

The children came to the Lord Jesus to find safety and peace. Whenever we come to the Lord Jesus in our prayers, we can find relief from the anxieties that life brings us. Whenever we come to the Lord in our prayers, we find safety. Sometimes we can be afraid to pray, or we are not sure what to tell God. We can simply share with the Lord whatever is on our hearts. The Lord knows what is on our hearts already, and so we bring our concerns to prayer for the Lord to take away anxiety and fill our hearts with peace.

Just as the Lord Jesus blessed the children that day, so the Lord Jesus does with us. Whenever we go to the Lord Jesus in prayer, He can provide us with His blessings and His peace. Whenever our time of prayer ends, we should have that sense of a lingering peace, a tranquility that will remain with us throughout our day.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord Jesus to welcome us as He welcomed the children that day. We ask the Lord to help us to pray, to draw us into prayer, so that we may find blessings and peace. We ask the intercession of the Mother of God, the New Eve, whose innocence, simplicity, and trust take us back to the very beginning, when things were simpler.