

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

***The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity***

**Gospel Reading**

**Mark 10.2-16**

2 Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ 3 He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ 4 They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.’ 5 But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6 But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” 7 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’

10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’

**Jesus Blesses Little Children**

13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ 16 And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

**Other Readings: Job 1.1; 2.1-10      Psalm 26      Hebrews 1.1-4; 2.5-12**

**Homily - The Children of this Kingdom**

One of the reasons for Christianity’s unexpected and unstoppable success in the first century in the Hellenistic world was its insistence on protecting children and seeing them as integral part of their communities. This was much more unusual than you might imagine. For example, a line taken from a papyrus dated June 17, 1 B.C. is from a husband to his pregnant wife: “I ask you and entreat you,” it says, “take care of the child, and if I receive my pay soon, I will send it up to you. Above all, if you bear a child and it is a male, let it be; if it is female, cast it out.”<sup>1</sup>

The last pagan Roman Emperor, Julian, expressed his contempt for the Christian care and concern for the vulnerable when he wrote this in A.D 360:

These impious Galileans (Christians) not only feed their own, but ours also...  
Whilst the pagan priests neglect the poor, the hated Galileans devote themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Oxyrhynchus Papyrus IV, No. 744, lines 9 f., cited by A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York, 1929), pp. 167–170

to works of charity, and by a display of false compassion have established and given effect to their pernicious errors. Such practice is common among them and causes contempt for our gods.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to these shocking sentiments, the early Christians saw children in the light of Jesus' attitude. In the Gospel of Mark there are very few instances where Jesus is portrayed as being indignant, or to give full force to Mark's language in today's gospel reading: "full of wrath". Some of those had to do with the religious leaders preventing people coming to Jesus to be healed on a Sabbath day, but here Jesus is angry with his own disciples for failing to understand, not just the nature of children, but the nature of the Kingdom of God.

The children in question are so young that they need to be brought by their parents. It is not their innocence or their capacity to understand salvation that merit Jesus' blessing but what they stood for: these children receive God's fatherly love as those who have nothing to demand. They come to God with empty hands, knowing that salvation and blessing are not reimbursements but sheer gifts. This attitude lies at the heart of Christian discipleship. As one Bible translation puts it: "Blest are those who know their need of God".

And yet that is only half the picture. Like the children who are brought to Jesus, we too are brought to God by the Church who, as our mother, brings us to Christ so that he can bless us. Perhaps we may not picture ourselves as sitting in Jesus' lap, but we can all picture ourselves as the Beloved Disciple in John's gospel, leaning against Jesus' breast at the Last Supper. We come to Christ most particularly in the Eucharist as little children, knowing our need and opening our hands to be fed by the One who is both the food and the host.

The world around us may find the Christian faith too simplistic and something to be made fun of – a childish fantasy not suitable from grown-ups. The world tells us that we need to grow out of these fairy tales. But what the world calls fairy tales can sometimes be infinitely more real than the more 'adult' narratives that it prefers. In the dedication of *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe* to his goddaughter Lucy, C.S. Lewis said: "I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again..."

May we never be 'too grown up' to meet Jesus in the gospel and receive His blessing.

Amen.

### **Conversation Questions**

1. When I look at my life, are there areas where I prevent people or issues "to be brought to Jesus"
2. When was the last time when I enjoyed leaning on Jesus' breast and enjoyed to be ministered by him?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?

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<sup>2</sup> Sozomen, "The Ecclesiastical History of Salaminus Hermias Sozomenus," in *Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Histories*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Chester D. Hartranft, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 338.

4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

### **Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

### **Collect of the day**

O God, forasmuch as without you  
we are not able to please you;  
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit  
may in all things direct and rule our hearts;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Faithful Lord,  
whose steadfast love never ceases  
and whose mercies never come to an end:  
grant us the grace to trust you  
and to receive the gifts of your love,  
new every morning,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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