

Homily For Saturday of the 19th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 13, 2022

Ezekiel 18:1-10,13,30-32 "All lives are mine. It is only the person who sins that shall die."

Psalms 51:10-17 "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken and contrite heart."

Matt 19:13-15 "Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom belongs to such as these."

Let the Little Children Come

Introduction

In our day, parents are often heard to say that they will not force religion on their children, but instead will wait until those same children are grown, to decide for themselves what religious views they will hold. This commonly held idea is absolute nonsense. If you are in a conversation with such a parent, sometimes your own children, you can ask them: Have you also decided then not to feed your children, waiting until they are grown so they can decide for themselves what food they like? And, have you declared that you will not speak to your child because that would impose a particular language, and you would rather they choose their own language when they are grown? What about education? Will you leave your children ignorant of all facts, so as not to force any particular knowledge on them?

Obviously, we can see the false logic here. Somehow, with respect to spiritual and religious nourishment, our culture seems to have come to the equally perverse conclusion that it is just fine to starve or malnourish the souls of our children. As a point of interest, studies show that children who have been provided with a religious foundation, even if they wander away from it, return to it in far higher numbers than those who find faith who were never given any as children.

Matthew

It is no accident that Matthew has Jesus blessing the children after declaring marriage a lifetime commitment. The first and most significant way that God blesses children is in happy and healthy homes. It's not the only way, of course,

since human weakness does not always make that ideal possible. Whether this happens or not, parents can still bring their children to Jesus. That's what we have in today's gospel passage. The disciples, in their ignorance on this matter, rebuked those parents and turned them away. Had they learned nothing from watching the Lord show kindness to children? Children are not a distraction to the Lord. He placed no age restriction on receiving salvation. He taught clearly that His kingdom belongs to little children.

Does that leave the rest of us out? Consider when Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus. He told that Pharisee that he would have to be born again to enter the kingdom. In a sense, he would have to become a newborn infant in relationship to God. The criterion for heaven is to be reborn of water and the Spirit. That is baptism, of course. It is also a life of faith letting Jesus touch us and bless us.

On the other hand, St. Paul says you have to leave behind childish ways and become mature in faith. Are these things contradictory? In a natural or worldly sense that could be argued. But, in the spiritual life, as is often the case, both are true. We can be innocent and humble children even while we grow mature in faith and its fruits: love, joy, peace and the rest.

There is an interesting side note here about the disciples preventing the children from coming to Jesus. The Greek word used for preventing is 'koluo'. In the early catechumenate, this was a technical term used in the examination of candidates for baptism. If those candidates did not fully adhere to the gospel or firmly intend to live a Christian life, they were prevented (koluo) from receiving the sacrament. But Jesus says that none should be 'koluo' prevented simply because they are children. In fact, he is the Lord over a kingdom which is the supernatural possession of those who are children of God.

Ezekiel

In the first reading, we see that the Lord is trying to teach Ezekiel something that Israel had a hard time grasping. It's about parents and children. There is a covenant relationship between God and his people, that parents are responsible

to teach their children. There is no waiting until they are adults. It's a major responsibility that parents teach their children to conform to the law of God. However, in this passage, God says to Ezekiel that both parents and children have to make their own decision about faith. If a father is virtuous, he will be saved. If he has a son who is wicked, that son will be judged for his wickedness. The holiness of the father will lead him to be a model for his children. He can discipline them and teach them and love them. Eventually, though, God judges each person according to his own deeds and his own heart.

The laws that are spelled out in this passage are really for adults. Children would not commit those sins, so they don't need these laws. They do need their natural and simple humility.

Our Lady's Saturday

When we look at Mary, we see the model disciple, a child of God in every way. Her childlike 'yes' is our perfect model of the humble child who is welcomed into the kingdom. But she also becomes the mother of Jesus. Along with Joseph, they nourish his body with food. They nourish his soul with the spiritual food of the Torah and the living of a virtuous life. At the foot of the cross, Mary became spiritual mother of all those united to Jesus in his mystical body, the Church. Jesus wanted us to know we would have a mother to raise us in faith. Jesus did not say: Here is a woman you can take or leave as your mother. In his anguish, he said to John and to all beloved disciples since: "Behold, your mother.

Like Christ himself, the Church invites parents to bring their children to baptism as soon as possible, so that the Spirit may inhabit their souls and they may join the warmth of the community of believers. All are invited to become children of the most high God. Let no one prevent them.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *All the earth shall bow down before you, and shall sing to your name, O Most High!*

Collect: *Almighty ever living God, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times.*

Ezekiel: *The word of the Lord came to me: This proverb concerning Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are not on edge?" This proverb shall no more be used. All lives are mine, the parent as well as the life of the child. It is only the person who sins that shall die. If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right; If he does not lift up his eyes to idols; Does not defile his neighbour's wife; nor opposes anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge; Gives bread to the hungry; Does not take interest; Executes true justice, and is careful to observe my ordinances, Acting faithfully; Such a one shall surely live says the Lord God. If he has a son who is violent, shall he then live? He shall not. His blood shall be upon himself. Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone. Turn, then, and live.*

Psalm: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Matthew: *Little children were being brought to Jesus in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; For it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And Jesus laid his hands on the children and went on his way.*