

Arms Up

There was a story of a saint who was low on grain for the orphanage he was running. The attendant who was with him showed him that there was only one small bag of grain left in the storage. Looking at the bag of grain, the window and back at the bag of grain the saint took the last small bag of grain and threw out of the window into the river. The attendant with him was shocked and asked what he was doing. He replied: now we can rely completely on the providence of God!

While I do not recommend that sort of external action all the time unless God is calling you to that, I do endorse the spirit of this attitude. It is the spirit of dependence and trust in God: it is the spirit of a child.

Jesus says today, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." Jesus is not calling us to literal, physical childhood but he is calling us to spiritual childhood, to embody the spirit of a child.

For the most part, children have this freedom about them. No child running around in the backyard ever asked themselves 'Gee, I wonder who is going to pay the mortgage this month?' There is a certain freedom because there is a sense of trust and dependence that my father, my mother has got this taken care of. The posture of a child is like this: two hands up to signify their dependence yet their trust.

Yet there are moments in our lives where we can lose this sense of trust, where we drop our arms. This mother who dropped off her son at kindergarten would observe this little girl who was dropped off by her mother. At first the little girl would cry loudly and get angry for the first several days, then after that the child would no longer cry but wimper in the corner and then finally by the end of several weeks the child was emotionless, not crying, not wimpering.

This child has gone through three stages: anger, despair and finally detachment. What can happen in our spiritual life is that we can also go through these three stages. We can get angry and frustrated that God has abandoned us in some way, then after feeling like he is ignoring us we move toward the stage of despair where we begin to doubt his love.

Finally we can get to the point where we build an emotional wall, we detach ourselves from God and we believe the lie that God does not really care about us at all.

Therefore instead of having dependence and trust we begin to develop a spirit of independence and control. I'm on my own, I have to take care of myself because God won't.

But Jesus comes to shatter this distorted view of God to show that we have the Father of fathers, the one who longs to gather us within his arms. What is one of the most frequent words Jesus uses during his passion? Father. Father not my will be done but yours, Father forgive them, Father! Into your hands I commit my spirit. Jesus embodies the spirit of a child because he is the Son of God, the eternal child of the Father and he reveals that even in the darkest moments of our life, we can depend on God and we can trust in him.

There are countless examples in Mother Teresa's life from Fr Leo who personally travelled with her. One day the missionaries of charity had run out of food to feed the thousands of poor one weekend. Mother Teresa exhorted them to pray and the next morning a truck came with marmalade, milk and bread. When the missionaries were in Vienna, they were paying high rent and Fr Leo was concerned about this but Mother Teresa said God would take care of this. As they were walking along they were interrupted by two elderly women. Fr Leo was slightly annoyed because he had the car running and Mother talked to them for a long time. After Mother had gotten in and when they had stopped at a red light she showed Fr Leo the package she received: 300 000 shillings which was about \$15 000 USD and she would say: do you understand now? Do you understand that we have a Father who takes care of us?

St. Francis de Sales writes that the degree of divine providence acting upon us is the degree of confidence we have in it. In other words, the more dependence and trust I have that God will pull through the more I allow him to work miracles in my life, the more I have my arms raised up ready to receive all that he has for me, ready to receive the kingdom.