

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B: September 19, 2021
"To be a child in the Kingdom of Heaven..."

Last week we discovered that to truly proclaim "Jesus as Lord," or "Jesus as the Christ" we must do as the Lord commands, that is, as He says: "*Whosoever would come after Me must deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow Me.*" (St. Mark 8. 34) The following verse is even more challenging: "*For whosoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whosoever loses his life for My sake and that of the Gospel will save it.*" (St. Mark 8 35) In reading these words of the Holy Gospel, I am reminded of the *murmurantes* in the sixth chapter of St. John, who, on hearing the Lord tell them that they must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, lest they have no life in them, responded: "*This is a hard saying; who can endure this?*" (St. John 6. 60)

And just as we heard Our Lord warn the Twelve about His coming passion and death in last week's Gospel, again in this Sunday's Gospel we hear His warning: "*The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill Him, and three days after His death the Son of Man will rise.*" (St. Mark 9. 31) But as we see, "... *they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question Him.*" (St. Mark 9. 32) It might be helpful to keep in mind that there were two reasons that the Twelve were having difficulties accepting the Lord's words about His passion and death, let alone His Resurrection from the dead. Why is this? Two things need to be kept in mind to better understand the Apostles' seeming inability to hear the Lord's words about His passion and death.

The first thing to keep in mind was the Lord's Transfiguration, which had been witnessed by Sts. Peter, James and John. There, on the Mountain with the Lord, they had seen Jesus transfigured, "*His clothes becoming dazzlingly white,*" and with Him, "*Moses and Elijah.*" (St. Mark 9. 3-4) And they heard the voice of the Father coming forth from the cloud of glory just as they heard at His Baptism "*This is My Beloved Son. Listen to Him.*" (St. Mark 9. 7) As I say, keep in mind that, upon coming down from the Mount, Jesus tells the three Apostles, "*not to tell anyone what they had seen, before the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*" (St. Mark 9. 10) Jesus keeps repeating His warning about His death, but they do not understand.

Then, having descended the Mount, the Lord and His disciples came upon a rather frightening scene. A father brought to the Lord his son, the boy having been troubled from his early youth with a demon, which none of the disciples could drive out. The Lord immediately cast the demon out. Interestingly, both the Gospels of Sts. Matthew and Mark record the Apostles asking the Lord why they could not drive the demon out themselves? And the Lord explained to them that, besides their lack of faith, this sort of evil spirit must be driven out by prayer and fasting (cf. St. Matthew 17. 21; St. Mark 9. 29)

Now, with these two events in mind, the Lord's Transfiguration and His mighty display of spiritual power with the evil one, it might stand to reason that the Twelve would be confused when Jesus said to them that He was going to be overpowered by evil men, and die. Hearing that, they would be overwhelmed. And, as for *rising from the dead*, remember, when the Lord told Sts. Peter, James and John not to tell anyone about what they saw during the Transfiguration; as St. Mark so charmingly puts it: "*they continued to discuss what 'to rise from the dead meant.'*" (St. Mark 9. 10) In other words, they most likely did not have the slightest idea of what the Lord was talking about. And, with the great events of power that the Apostles had witnessed, and the horrible prospect of losing their beloved Lord, could it be that they just simply *shut down*, as it were, psychologically speaking? How often is it, when faced with disaster, do we simply... shut down, turn away, act as if everything is *normal*, when we know full well, in the pit of our gut, that everything is not normal at all, and may never be normal again? Especially when our heart is on the verge of breaking? Certainly, when the Apostles heard the words of Jesus: "*The Son of Man will be handed over to death and they will kill Him...*" since they did not yet understand the Resurrection from the dead, what were they to do?

And so, they begin to play a foolish game. They argue, acting on the knowledge they had recently learned from Peter's being given the Keys of the Kingdom, from his Confession of Faith... "*They had been discussing among themselves...who was the greatest.*" (St. Mark 9. 34) When asked by the Lord what they had been discussing, of course, "*they remained silent,*" out of sheer embarrassment. Wouldn't you or I? But the Lord writes straight with crooked lines. And from this moment of embarrassment comes one of the most beautiful teachings – and perhaps, for Jesus, His most important teaching:

"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last and the servant of all.' Then, taking a child, He placed it in the midst of them, and putting His arms around it, He said, 'Whoever receives on child such as this in My name, receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me, but the One Who sent Me.'" (St. Mark 9. 35-37)

You know, we live in a funny age. We live in an age of technological marvels. I am not criticizing these marvels by any means. These new inventions we have created in the last several years – indeed, I am using one now to create this paper, and I shall use another technological marvel, the so-called e-mail system, to send this paper to willing readers throughout the United States, all done within a matter of mere moments – can do marvelous things. But they are not the answer to all of our needs. They are tools. No more, no less. These tools are good. They are a monument to man's ability to "*fill the earth and subdue it,*" (*Genesis 1. 28*) when our work is done for the glory of God and for the love of God and neighbour. There is a catch, however (isn't there always?!).

In the spiritual life today, there seems to be this notion that we need to have a book, a method or a technique to learn to pray, to learn to see God, to do the work of God. But the Lord tells us, quite simply, to be like children. What does that mean? Listen to the words of Fr. Breen:

The child is not proud; it easily forgives injuries; it trusts, obeys, loves. It reposes in the parent's love securely, happily. Its heart has not yet been hardened by the cold selfish struggle of the world. The Christian is the child of God, and he cannot be too much of a child of God... We should be perfectly safe, if we would only be little children with God. (1)

The Lord calls us, pure and simply, to be *child-like*, not *childish*. There's a great difference between the two. To be a spiritual child, to see the good in others, better yet, to search for the good in others, especially in those that the world has cast aside.

Who are those people that the world has cast aside? The 'cast-aside people' are those who, perhaps, are not as bright, as attractive, as worldly, that is, sophisticated, as our television and movie media think that all of us ought to be. In other words, the 'cast-asides' are those who may not be the 'popular ones.' And, the 'cast-asides' might just well be the little saints among us, if we have but eyes to see and ears to hear.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, (+1897) one of our newer Doctors of the Church, is a splendid example of spiritual childhood. Her 'Little Way,' as it is usually called, is made for the normal man, living in the world, with all of the cares of a normal life. The Saint always maintained that Her way was a way of complete confidence and trust, because it was the way of a child.

St. Thérèse especially loved the Scripture from St. Matthew's Gospel which parallels this Gospel today: "... *unless you turn and become a little child...*" (*St. Matthew 18. 4*) Thus, the Saint referred to God, her Heavenly Father as Papa le Bon Dieu, that is, Daddy the Good God. And, her suffering was legendary. Not only from the tuberculosis that ravaged her body, but from the misunderstanding that was her constant lot from the many Sisters in the convent who thought her way of religion too easy, *too child-like*. And in her child-like trust, St. Thérèse even allowed her Father-God, Papa le Bon Dieu, to lead her to the Cross, where Jesus is truly Lord. Not so easy, is it?

Today, if you wish to see if St. Thérèse's way is an easy prospect, try to do everything you do today for Jesus, for Mary, and most especially for Daddy the good God. Try to treat each person today as if that person were Christ... how often is it that Christ has passed you by, in the words of St. Josemaria Escrivá? Or, could it be that we have more 'cast-asides' than we realize? A wonderful priest, who has marvelous insights on St. Thérèse has written this insightful poem that might give us pause to think:

You call them deranged,
They've lost their balance.
Marginals,
Psychotics, neurotics, unloved,
The weepy ones you try to avoid –
Are you afraid to touch them?
Are you one of them? Perhaps at least one of you is.
Welcome your family.

I have been there.
I know what it is like.
Fall on your knees before them.
An infinite mystery dwells there.
Call-me-normals will never guess
The intensity of that love
That they live.

Theirs is the stigma of JESUS
(His family called Him mad.)
Now see His glory on their drawn faces.
He loves them just as they are.

Even if their acceptance of His love
Must be eked out in an utter poverty.
They offer only their inability to offer more. (2)

Most people don't know that poor Thérèse suffered a complete mental collapse somewhere around her ninth birthday. Her illness was so severe that it almost took her life. She was only cured by the intervention of Our Lady Herself. The scars, however, remained for some years. Because of that, Thérèse never lost her delicacy for those who suffered. When we learn to see with the eyes of a child, when we learn true spiritual childhood, we know longer count a man's wounds against him. We only see the wounds as signs and symbols of the suffering Christ – and we long to ease that suffering. Lord, give us the eyes of children!

1. Fr. A.E. Breen, *A Harmonized Exposition of the Four Gospels*, v. 3 of 4, John P. Smith Printing Co, 1908, pg. 77
2. Fr. Daniel-Ange, *Wounds Healed by Love Alone, A Charismatic Interview with St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, Laser Press Publishers, 1996, pg. 16