14th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 11:25-30

Our Lord often referred to children. In this Gospel He says, “I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.” In another place He says, “unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” and “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 when He enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday it is the children who cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

But why do children take such a prominent place in Our Lord’s teaching? Why does He emphatically and repeatedly say that only those who are like children will enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Today when we place a great deal of emphasis on maturity and knowledge and expertise it is odd to think of the immature and the uninformed and the weak as role models. Maybe it is their utter and unashamed reliance on their mother and father for food and shelter and clothing and love. They are not embarrassed to go to their mother and father for food because they know very well that is where food comes from. They are not ashamed to go to them for a hug because it is natural for their mother and father to give them affection. To become like children, to be infants rather than wise and intelligent, means that we must surrender ourselves completely and unabashedly to God, our Father. To do this is not weak or insipid or cowardly. It is, in fact, a reclamation of our original condition—our condition before the sin of Adam and Eve. It is a return to our place as creature before the creator, as son and daughter before our Father. Who can know what they have made better than the one who made it? Who can love a child more than their own mother and father?

When Our Lord speaks of the "learned and the clever" in this Gospel, He means the scribes and the Pharisees and all others who reject Him. Their pride means that the significance of Christ's acts and the presence of God's kingdom is hidden from them. And it is pride that is among the greatest of sins, because it is pride that prevents us from being who we are created to be. Pride means that we do not want to be a son or a daughter. And if we are not a son or a daughter then we have not, in fact, never had, a mother and a father. Because when Our Lord speaks of children He means His disciples—those who listen and recognise His significance. Those who are not afraid to admit that they do not know and they do not understand it all.

It is why Christmas is so wonderful—because in that child laying in a stable is God Himself. To truly adore Him we must lay aside all our false sense of certainty and intellectual pride to see who it is that is before us. That the all-powerful, all-knowing God is lying there as a child, and to recognise that we are less than He is. And to truly see him who lies there in that manger, we must fall on our knees.

So many today believe that they know what is good for the Church, that they speak for God—or even worse—that they correct God. They are caught up in the things of this world, in the so-called values of this world, and say that the Church needs to catch up. This is the false certainty and the intellectual pride that means we can never humble ourselves, we can never become like little children and see with open eyes the beauty and the majesty that lies before us in God. It was Avery Cardinal Dulles who said, "it is not the Church that cannot keep up with the world, but the world that cannot keep up with the Church."

Today to apologise is seen as weakness, to admit we don't know something is shameful, to act with humility is scorned and ridiculed. But without this humility—which, by definition means, knowing myself as I truly am—we will never behold the wonder of salvation and we will never have the fullness of life that Our Lord wants for us.

God became man and was born as a child who relied on His mother and father. We, too, then must become like a child and rely on God.