

## **Homily – Proper 18 – Matthew 18**

**Text – Matthew 18:2–3 – And calling to Him a child, (Jesus) put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

Back in the 80’s, a toy corporation began to use a jingle that worked its way into everyone’s brain to the point that it became, for some, a mantra for life. I’m sure you can remember it. *“I don’t want to grow up, I’m a ‘Toys R Us’ kid.”* Teenagers and young adults really grabbed hold of these words. Everyone was trying to tell them they need to grow up and be an adult but, they wanted to hold on to their last bit of youth. Even some adults couldn’t help but want to try to relive those simpler days before bills, jobs, houses and families began to consume their life. They wanted to escape back into the world of childlike wonder and fun.

This desire for the carefree life of our youth requires us to understand the difference between the words “childlike” and “childish”. Being “childlike” refers to the innocence of youth. It means seeing the world through unclouded eyes without any hint of pride and jealousy. It sees everything as if it’s the first time and joyfully lives for each day. Being “childish” is where pride meets innocence. We’ve all seen it. A child wants something they shouldn’t have and when they are denied, a tantrum erupts. If a child wants something but it belongs to someone else, they may just take it which causes the other child to break out in ear splitting screaming. If one questions the existence of original sin in all of us, all we need do is watch our children’s childish behavior. We didn’t teach them this and yet they still do it.

**At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”** Of all the questions the disciples could ask, this one seems the most “childish”. Christ has never pointed to one person and said that somehow they ranked above everyone else nor did He establish some sort of competition to see who would be the greatest. But, here they are, arguing over something which they could have earned nor for a position which they would ever be qualified. You can almost hear them now. “I’m the greatest.” “No way! I’m better

than you.” “No, I am.” Grown men, arguing like children on the basis of pride, figuring they have done something grand and glorious to merit this one illustrious post.

**And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them.** The disciples were heading into a very dangerous area. Their childish behavior not only was spoiling their relationship with Jesus but also were dragging down those who are “children” in their faith who may be witnessing the whole affair, causing them to concentrate on things which have no place in the Kingdom of heaven. This prideful discussion can cause others to become “childish” in their beliefs and may even cause them to fall away from the one, true faith.

What Christ calls for is “childlike” faith. Like a child, their faith should be one that trusts without reservation. A child trusts its mother and father without a doubt. It takes its parents at their word. Like a child, we as children of faith trust that God will always be there, that He will always provide our daily bread. We also trust His Word. When He says we are forgiven by Christ the crucified and that through His sacrifice we have eternal life, we believe without reservation. The world may deceive and childishly hesitate when it comes to the promises of God, but, in childlike faith, the child of God says “Amen” to all that God has said and done.

Our childlike faith is also to be joyous. Nothing makes a child happier than to be held in their parent’s arms and to hear their parents say, “I love you.” God loves us. His love is deeper and greater than any human love; even greater than a mother’s love. God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah says, **“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.”** We rejoice in a love that never fails.

Our childlike faith is also carefree. A child never worries about whether they will have clothes to wear or food to eat. As children of faith, we are not **anxious about our life, what we will eat, nor about our body, what we will put on because we know that life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.** We do not worry because faith rests in the confidence

that **our Father knows** what we need and provides them without fail.

Christ prizes such a childlike faith. To preserve such faith among believers, Jesus warns against anything that would offend this faith or cause one weak or new in the faith to believe less. He says, **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”**

Quickly, we’d say, “That’s not me. I’d never do that.” Yet, we forget how one thoughtless word, one sinful act, or even one negative remark about Scripture, the Church or the ministry can cripple or even kill the faith of ones who look to us for guidance and wisdom. By injecting our childish fears and pride, we can endanger the spiritual of the young and the new in faith. We can tarnish their trust and cause them to become skeptical about every person and even God Himself. We can snuff out their joy by causing them to question God’s infinite wisdom and love in both good and trying times. We can steal away their certainty of God’s provision in their life by causing them to worry about all the things they cannot change or to lust after the things they do not need.

Are we careful in our words and actions? Do we consider the faith of the young ones or young in faith who are looking to us and believing our every word? Do we really understand the seriousness of leading just one soul away from God, away from His Word and away from His Church?

Christ sounds the warning, **“See that you do not despise one of these little ones.”** What He is saying is, “Take heed, pastors, parents and everyone who has influence on these young ones that you teach them to pray, and lead them into the arms of the Church whereby they hear the Word and believe, and know Christ. This is your office. Educate these children for Me for I have entrusted them to you.”

Here in St. Matthew’s Gospel, Christ tells us that heaven takes an interest on the soul of every child of faith. He says, **“For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”** He tells us that there are

special angels, heavenly beings that stand before God always, who stand in the indescribable glory of heaven. These blessed angels are delegated for service to the children of faith. When we feel alone, these angels are there, they look upon us, guarding us so that the evil one may frighten or harm us. These angels are not only with our children, but also with us older people who are still children of faith.

*“I don’t want to grow up, I’m a ‘Toys R Us’ kid.”* We are not children of a toy corporation but are children of faith. This faith shows us the love of our heavenly Father who not only provides for every want of body and soul but also provides for our spiritual life as well. He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us, restore us and bring us the greater gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. He provides us with those who teach us the faith and even those who we cannot see, blessed angels who stand faithful guard over us. In humble, childlike faith, I bow my head and say a prayer of thanks and rejoice in a life lived in His promise.

AMEN