

## *Homily 25th Sunday Year B - Children*

In the Apostles Creed we regularly express our faith in, and claim to be members of, the Holy Catholic Church. Catholic means 'universal' or 'all embracing' - in emulation of the love of Jesus which was wholly inclusive. All the Gospels reveal his large-heartedness. His charity reached out to everyone: rich and poor, Jew and Gentile; to social outcasts and public sinners; believer and non-believer; to the old and to the young. If we are to be truly Christian we should be as welcoming as Jesus.

Today's Gospel shows the attitude of Jesus towards little children. He puts his arms around them with true affection; he is glad for them to be in His presence. We may recall another incident when the disciples were inclined to keep the children away lest they should be a nuisance or a distraction. Jesus' rebuke was swift: *Let the little ones come to me - do not send them away; it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*

The heart of Jesus **delights** in the company of children. Moreover He sees, in their complete dependency and trust, an example of the attitude that is required of all of us if we are to experience the love of God to the full: *Unless you become like little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

To have children with us - in our homes, in our lives, in our prayer, in our worship - is to have a continual reminder of how our hearts should be disposed towards God.

Certainly children make demands on us - but in this very demanding they are truly instruments of God's grace. They confront us with our own selfishness, like mirrors. They try our patience and reveal its limits. Children test our generosity and may find it wanting.

Their insights into our motives can sting us with the truth of their perception. Children seem to know when we are not being genuine, or when we are hiding something.

Children expect courage from us, and consistency, and resilience. Children expect us to be faithful to the promises we have made.

In their simplicity and directness they return us to the heart of prayer.

If we have children as our companions we can grow in our ability to love God and our fellow creatures. In a very real sense God lives in them and approaches us through them: *Anyone who welcomes one of these little ones in my name welcomes me.*

We need children to see how much growing we have still to do ourselves. We need children for our love to be stretched to its full capacity. We need children in our midst to remind us of what really matters.

To cut ourselves off from children is to be impoverished - we can become mean, introspective, self-righteous. Children will not allow any of these things to happen to us. They are God's gift to us.

I have spoken before of our important it is to welcome our children at Mass for **their** sakes. How we bring them - even as babes and infants - into a real **experience** of the Christian community at prayer; so that they may begin to hear the Gospel of Jesus and respond to it as far as they are able.

Today Jesus reminds us how important it is to welcome children among us for **our** sake. We need to bring them here with us so that they can help us to discern our true selves; to be reminded of our need of God; to help us grow in simplicity and charity.

If we claim to be 'Catholic', 'universal', 'all-embracing' in our love this means that we should always delight, as Jesus did, in the company of children. Most especially when, together with those children, we are in His presence at Mass.