

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Feb 25th 2017

Many of us think of Jesus as mostly loving and patient, even when his Apostles exasperate him. Yet In today's gospel, he seems to be clearly irritated and annoyed. He has probably been speaking to the crowd and now is mobbed by children -- and parents who want Jesus to bless their children. The disciples don't want Jesus "bothered," and tell the parents to leave Jesus alone.

Once again, his disciples have missed the point of his teachings. The children are exactly who Jesus wants to be with at that moment. They represent the innocent and vulnerable of his teachings. He continuously asks us to protect those who are fragile.

Not only are we called on to help and care for them but to become like them. Children are helpless, and rely on us to feed, love and protect them. They believe that we will do that -- and it mirrors the trust Jesus wants us to have in God. As adults we have learned to be self-protective and not to trust so willingly. But the kind of radical trust in God that Jesus tells us we need to enter the Kingdom of God can only come from our hearts, not our heads.

And in the same way he calls us to love and protect children, Jesus asks us repeatedly to care for the vulnerable, the poor, the marginalized and the stranger. We can ask ourselves if our hearts are really open to those who are dependent on us -- those who are like children?

It can be powerful to ask ourselves where we are not comfortable with this kind of hospitality? Do we see ourselves as brothers and sisters with the poor? Pope Francis says, "It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about."

Today might be the right time to look into our hearts and ask who our brothers and sisters are? Is Jesus inviting us to be more simple, less judgmental, and more merciful as we look at those we might hold at a distance from our own lives? Is Jesus inviting us to embrace the Kingdom this way?

Dear Jesus, Let me embrace your whole kingdom -- not just the parts I am comfortable with. Take me and help me to be more like a trusting child. Calm my anger, my sophisticated arguments and the restless fears that take away my innocent dependence on you. Let me seek you first, so that I can more peacefully and simply love my spouse, my children, my relatives, other people in my life. I ask your help especially with those who annoy me. Soften my heart and help me to love them more. Help me to listen to people who hold views quite different from me, even those I don't want to include in my world and help me remember they are also your beloved children.

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