

# Encouragement Encouragement

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## CHILDISH or Childlike?

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There are many times that Jesus refers to children in the Gospels. He heals Jairus' daughter. He uses the loaves and fishes of the little boy to feed thousands. He encourages children to come to Him and makes some very challenging comments about being a child. But these are often difficult to work out with a meaning that is understood. On the surface we all appreciate the simplicity and directness of children and their innocence. We all love to see their smiles and laughter. We rejoice at their agility and their ability to learn and sometimes even their fearlessness. But then when we are called, as Jesus says, to be 'like little children' we sometimes wonder what exactly He meant. His words are indeed very strong for He says that unless we become like them we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.



Is He saying that the Kingdom therefore is full only of Children? Clearly this is not so, but He is encouraging us to be like them. This too, is difficult to grasp as we spend much of our time trying to 'grow up' and be adults in thought, deed and work not to mention having a mature faith. So how can we reconcile these two positions of being mature Christians full of faith and love and yet be like children?

There is a lovely story about two little boys, friends, against a backdrop of prejudice. One is white skinned, the other brown. One has fair longish hair the other has very little. The little boy with the longish hair begs his mother to cut off all his hair. She asks why? The reply she gets is... 'so that the teacher can't tell us apart.' The two boys see beyond the differences in their little friendship and do not use the categories of others, maybe later to have them imposed on them. They are being children and innocent yet somehow profoundly loving.

Many of us have experienced the wisdom of children too, and how they can cut through what is often 'red tape' and falseness and go directly to the point... sometimes humorously... and perceptively.

We also know that in that learning process they can make mistakes and can be very childish, as indeed their years require and indicate. Jesus Himself makes reference to this in 'Matthew' when He speaks of them shouting at each other in the Market place. "What description can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the marketplace." (Matthew 11 16-19). Jesus uses the childishness of children who do not fully understand things yet, to compare them with adults who refuse to understand.

These two comparison of being '*Childish*' and '*Childlike*' are crucial if we want to try to understand the words and significance of what Jesus is teaching us. The late Cardinal Basil Hume said this...

"Remain a little person. By this I mean small in my own estimation of myself, to be unimportant whatever position I hold or talents I have. It is to remember that only one thing matters and that is what God thinks about me. Smile at yourself, your failures, at your spiritual incompetence. Have a sense of humour."

This 'littleness' is surely part of what Jesus was trying to tell us. Some of the most remarkable people who achieve greatness in the sense of holiness or having used their talents to their best ability have often demonstrated this littleness, this kind of humility and straightforwardness. This is often reflected in their attitude to their success or their belittling of it. They are often self-effacing.

Sometimes we meet people whose innocence has almost a childlike quality. They do not have to be either clever or simple, but they have a beauty about them, which while childlike, is not a naiveté or exaggerated simplicity for the sake of affectation. They have a grace and a benevolence about them which is a God given gift. St. John the Evangelist seems to be portrayed in this way as always leaning on the Lord. This is also a secret of being childlike. Children depend on adults to lead them. They have a trustfulness that they will be guided. This quality of trust and dependence is a mark often of being childlike in the belief that *The Lord* will guard and protect us in all circumstances. This can be seen to in those, who having suffered much, still say... something like 'the Lord knows best' or 'we shall see how thing go', without wishing to pre-empt anything or bulldoze their way into activity.

**"Lord, give me the heart of a child and the awesome courage to live it out." Catherine Doherty**

Today, this quality is often neglected and shunned as we view it as a childish trust or not having maturity or the 'get up and go' that seems to be so highly prized. Yet these beautiful souls in spite of everything achieve perhaps the most precious of all gifts, a peace of heart.

Theirs truly is a prize for they are often peacemakers who the Lord also gift with the Kingdom... 'Blessed are the Peace-makers for they shall be called the children of God.' (Matthew 5.9.) Those who seek this childlike quality find it through adversity and simplicity. They know their place before God and they hold it in a special kind of tension while everything around them is in turmoil or critical of them or their actions. St. Francis of Assisi held this kind of vulnerability when he was being subjected to ridicule and all manner of insults. Indeed the list of Saints that possess this quality is great and one could almost say that it is a required quality in order to be holy. This must not be confused with a kind of false placidity which does not have a care for justice and right, but they develop a way to attain it by their reliance on God. This requires of them to *fall in love* with God and understand that true riches are obtained by surrender and love.

St Thérèse of Lisieux is a prime example of this and she indeed is famous for 'her treatise' 'on being small.' She wanted a quick way to Heaven that was straight forward as she did not think she had the ability to do it any other way. Her genius was 'her little way' which did not require great deed, or heroic action but by doing all she could, putting up with all she could, and surrendering all she could in her everyday action which she carried out to the best of her ability. This in the end required real heroism and there were those who attacked this quality in her. She understood that she had to follow her Lord who she said made Himself 'so small which showed His great mercy and love'.

Likewise, St. Teresa of Calcutta regarded herself as very insignificant, yet was a founder of a religious movement now recognised for its worth and service. She said "I am a little pencil in the hands of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world."

St. Faustyna wrote (Diary 140) 'only one thing is needed to please God: to do even the smallest things out of great love'. It is interesting to note that both St. Thérèse and St. Faustyna died young. Mother Teresa on the other hand lived long to be a shining exemplar of this poverty of spirit...

As we now start a New Year maybe this is a blessing that we should cultivate and seek in all our actions.....

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A resolution to live simply, purely and with a childlike trust in the Lord, would bring many blessings to those around us. **Blessings to all in this New Year and May God help us to be Childlike.** Halina Holman

**Pope Francis**

"Living our humility, Christian humility, means having this fear of the Lord which, I repeat, is not terror but is: You are God, I am a person, I journey forward in this way with the little things of life but walking in Your presence and trying to be perfect. Humility is the virtue of the childlike and this is true humility and not a rather theatrical humility: no, not that: the humility of somebody who said: I am humble but proud of being so. No, that is not true humility. The humility of the childlike is that of somebody who walks in the presence of the Lord, does not speak badly about others, looks only at serving and feels that he or she is the smallest .... That is where their strength lies. "

Rome July 2017



**Poem**

Is it childish to be simple to be direct with one another  
 To be forever giving of ourselves,  
 to seek no other way to please except to tenderly touch,  
 To offer much  
 By bearing such love that only  
 The Greatest Lover can direct our Soul.  
 If by being simple it is childlike we become,  
 We reflect our innocent being  
 Simplicity assumes a deeper meaning,  
 We become children of the Eternal Fold. H.H.

**Feast Days in January**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Theotokos, Mary, Mother of God**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> St. Basil the Great
- 3<sup>rd</sup> The Holy Name of Jesus
- 4<sup>th</sup> St. Elizabeth
- 5<sup>th</sup> Second Sunday after Nativity Epiphany**
- 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Baptism of the Lord**
- 17<sup>th</sup> St. Anthony, Abbot
- 19<sup>th</sup> Second Sunday in Ordinary time**
- 21<sup>st</sup> St. Agnes
- 22<sup>nd</sup> St. Vincent de Paul
- 24<sup>th</sup> St. Francis de Sales
- 25<sup>th</sup> Conversion of St. Paul, Apostle
- 26<sup>th</sup> Third Sunday in Ordinary time**
- 27<sup>th</sup> St. Angela Merici
- 28<sup>th</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas
- 31<sup>st</sup> St. John Bosco