

PENTECOST 20 2025 All Souls' **BECOMING LIKE CHILDREN**

From today's Gospel: *Jesus said, Let the children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.* (Lk 18. 16-17)

The word 'great' implies that someone has done an extraordinary feat, has done something few if any others have done. When we think of the word great, our minds focus on famous people: star athletes, politicians, those who have wealth, people who make headlines. Jesus had a different definition of greatness. Jesus taught that the way to greatness was through serving others, not in being served. Modern persons whom Jesus would consider great are people who receive little public acclaim: discoverers of vaccines that cure diseases, humanitarians, advocates for the impoverished and marginalised, the quiet achievers in this life.

The hidden secret in all of this is the innocence, awe, wonder and trust of children. In today's Gospel, people were bringing children to Jesus, that he might touch them and he demonstrates to his disciples what true greatness means. A child comes with no strings attached, no apparent baggage, no great possessions to offer back to the one who cares and loves, but so much trust, affection and abandonment. A child comes with acceptance, awe and wonder. I can remember a school friend, Burt Bush, in West Perth aged about twelve, giving me a favourite tie of his just because I admired it. I hope that, when he became an adult, he didn't change and become possessive, predictable and calculating, as some adults become. We can easily lose the childlike spark that ignites all that is truly great and precious in life, and become absurdly unadventurous, conditional and suspicious in older age. We may also cease to give away wealth and possessions extravagantly. This human dilemma is also found in today's Gospel where a certain ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?". It turns out that he has kept the commandments since his youth, yes, he can confidently tick those off; but Jesus is after his hip-pocket nerve as well. "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." This is too hard for the man, who otherwise, like the twelve disciples, would have discovered that he had everything he needed if he had simply joined the apostolic band, just as Peter did when he left his nets; Matthew did when he left the tax office, and I did when I left Pemberton WA and went to St Michael's House, Crafers, not even having a diocese to sponsor me for 2 years; but they gave me keep, a roof over my head, and formation for the priesthood.

The disciples, caught up in their constant struggle for personal success, argued who would be the greatest. It is always painful to compare our motives with Christ's. It is not wrong for believers to be industrious or ambitious. However, when ambition pushes obedience and service to one side, it becomes sin. Pride or insecurity can cause us to over-value position and prestige. Ours is a world where narcissism abounds, where people are engrossed by themselves and their own importance, so that being like a child is really counter-cultural. If we want someone to advance our career or our position in life, a child is not the one to help do it. Children cannot give these things but must have these things done for them. We should cultivate the friendship of people who cannot do things for us, but for whom we can do great things. To receive a child is to receive Jesus himself.' This is the greatness of the Kingdom.

I conclude with a reflection from my little book, *If Fish is All You Want*

Spiritual Milk and our first-born child, ***William***.

1Peter 2.2 Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.

Having a baby is something words can't describe, God; you must have been thrilled to see your Son, your Word, born of Mary, your chosen. You see it all the time. William means so much to us. He gives so much to us, yet he is so dependent on his mother, her care, her warmth, her milk...all these things she gladly gives and I support her as best I can.

Little William looks so content at his mother's breast – yes, he longs for that food – many an anxious cry is quickly abated as he clamps on to that food supply. When he's hungry, no amount of back patting or hugs or smiles will do the trick; there's only one thing on that young mind.

I should long for your resources like that Lord – quelling my false anxiety and preserving me from self-righteousness. How often your Word says we have to be more like babes and children...I can see why.

Thank you, Lord, for William and for every new birth. Help me to be born anew by reaching for the food of your Spirit, craving for it, until I am satisfied by nothing else.

Amen.