



The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father."

Introductory Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for giving me another day to grow in love for you, another day to move ahead in my spiritual life, another day to pray for the souls closest to me. I want only to please you during this brief time of prayer.

Petition: Lord, grant me the grace of childlike simplicity.

1. Turning the Tables: The disciples are curious about the Kingdom of Heaven, and their curiosity has a tinge of self-interest. They want to know how to get ahead in the Kingdom. Their very question belies a misunderstanding of Christ. The Kingdom, among other things, is reflected in the Church on earth. And the Church, being universal, is a kind of family that takes in all mankind. If ever we ask, "Who is the greatest in our family?" we can be sure that it is the wrong kind of question. The more appropriate question is: "How can I be a better member of the family? How can I be a better husband? A better wife? A better son or daughter or brother or sister?" That is the question Christ wants us to ask ourselves.

2. Child's Play: We must not think that Christ had a naive notion of children as little angels who never do wrong. So why does Christ hold up children as models for the rest of us? In part, it is their simplicity, their tendency to trust. They might not understand why a parent tells them something, but they likely will accept it because they realize it comes from someone who loves them. The spiritual life requires that same kind of trust. We might not understand completely why God asks us to do something, but if there's a basic trust and openness to him, it is easier to follow his commands. Many people, unfortunately, squander what should be the most productive years of their lives because

they doubt God and his Church. They complicate things, only to find years later the wisdom of what Our Lord was trying to tell them. By then, their faults can be forgiven, but not undone. Once a vase is broken, it can be fixed but it will never be the same as if it had never broken. Am I saying no to God because of a lack of trust?

3. Angelic Aid: Prayers to guardian angels used to be popular with Catholics. It is fitting that we pray to them, because each of us has one. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life," writes St. Basil (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 336). Our angel reflects God's loving providence for our welfare and protection. The world is a moral minefield, waiting for us to make the wrong step. Our angel helps us make it through this valley of tears. Do I ever think to pray to my angel?

Conversation with Christ: The simplicity of children can make me look foolish by comparison. I believe in you and trust you, Lord. Help me to translate that trust into serenity and simplicity. Let me accept the crosses of daily life with calmness, seeing your loving designs behind them.

Resolution: I will say "yes" to the next difficult thing someone asks of me, so long as it is something morally good.