



Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Mark 10: 13-16.

People were bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced the children and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

Introductory Prayer:

Lord, I believe in your love and care for me and for my family. I believe that you call me to help protect, guide and inspire innocence and holiness in others. I trust that you will show me how to do this better. I love you, Lord, for the purity of your love, and I wish to love you with the fullness and innocence of my baptismal faith.

Petition:

Lord Jesus, restore my innocence so I can draw nearer to you.

1. Two Visions:

Again the poor disciples seem to miss the point, so Jesus sternly speaks to them: "Do not stop them!" Today many of us also fail to understand, and by our lack of understanding we prevent children from coming to Jesus. We think there are so many important activities for them to do-they need to keep up with the other kids, they need to compete, they need to do what they want-and the world heartily agrees. "Let the little children come to me," it says with the raspy voice of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Only Jesus has the courage to insist, "Bring them to me, now." Why is Jesus so anxious to touch, bless, teach and receive these children? Might it be that this is the critical age for them to know and love him as a friend? Do I do enough to let this happen, or do the customs of the world dwarf my efforts? To whom should my efforts belong?

2. "To Such as These"

We all struggle to "enter the Kingdom" every day. We tend to be impatient to grow up and be independent. But then, as adults, we wish we had the innocence and simple lives

of children, so better to love God. What has become of our innocence? We now know good and evil, and evil makes its presence felt, like the ring carried by Frodo in The Lord of the Rings. Is innocence worth preserving? Is it possible to recover? Our Lord suggests "yes" to both questions. If I desire to fight for the Kingdom, my battle should start by defending innocence, the only door to the Kingdom. Do I fight for it at home, in the media, on the Internet, at school, in the neighborhood, at work?

3. Receiving the Kingdom:

"Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child" applies to me each day of my life. Now, the grace of baptism does not disappear. It is renewed each time I pray, each time I offer God my life and day, and each time I prayerfully listen to his Word speak to me. So also, each time I gaze upon Jesus through the eyes of Mary with a rosary in hand, and each time I thank God for his many blessings. The more I experience Christ in the sacraments of the Eucharist and reconciliation, the more powerfully he renews this grace of receiving the Kingdom. The one common condition-that I trust like a little child-is the act of faith through which I enter in contact with the King. Innocence can be recovered and restored, but not without a childlike faith. How deliberately do I exercise this rejuvenating faith? Do I desire that Jesus take me up in his arms, lay his hands on me, and bless me each day?

Conversation with Christ:

Dear Lord, renew my relationship with you. Make it as simple and sincere as that of a child.

Renew my innocence as I strive to love you without pride or vanity. Increase my faith, as total and pure as when I was a child, so that I can live my baptism to the full.

Resolution:

I will commit to fight for innocence in a more practical way: control the use of Internet or TV at home, get my children involved in a faith/virtue program, pray with them at night, take my family to confession, study Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, find a chastity program for young adolescents, etc.