

Readings for October 7, 2018 — 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Let the Children Come to Me

Our call from God is a lifelong one. In Genesis (first reading), God is creating a new and pure world, a world before the fall – a world of harmony and love. Jesus, by his coming, recalls that perfection created by God. He returns again to the unity of marriage and uses children as an example of purity of heart and soul. We can find the perfection that God desired for us in Jesus' loving embrace.

Suggested opening song: In the Silence (Josh Blakesley, Sarah Kroger)

Opening prayer: (See back pages)

Opening Question:

Take a minute to think of some reasons why you have chosen (or felt called) to participate in an SCC group this fall. In the space below, write down two or three things you hope to gain through this experience. (If you feel comfortable, share these with the group).

Reading 1 GN 2:18-24

The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone.

I will make a suitable partner for him."

So the LORD God formed out of the ground

various wild animals and various birds of the air,

and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them;

whatever the man called each of them would be its name.

The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all wild animals;

but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep,

he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib

that he had taken from the man.

When he brought her to the man, the man said:

"This one, at last, is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman, '

for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother

and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.

Responsorial Psalm PS 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

R. (cf. 5) **May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Blessed are you who fear the LORD,
who walk in his ways!
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
blessed shall you be, and favored.

R. **May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
your children like olive plants
around your table.

R. **May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the LORD.
The LORD bless you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

R. **May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

R. **May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives.**

Reading 2 HEB 2:9-11

Brothers and sisters:

He "for a little while" was made "lower than the angels, "
that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
For it was fitting that he,
for whom and through whom all things exist,
in bringing many children to glory,
should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering.
He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin.
Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them "brothers."

Gospel MK 10:2-16

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked,
"Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?"
They were testing him.
He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?"
They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her."
But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment.
But from the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female.*
For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh.
Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."
In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this.

He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." And people were bringing children to him 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 them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

Related Reflections:

Marriage and Divorce in Jesus' World

In the ancient Mediterranean world, marriages were between families. Each family selected a partner, intending to bind the families together, forming a stronger unit. Just as children cannot choose their parents, so too children in this culture could not choose their marriage partners. God chose one's parents, and through one's parents God chose one's marriage partner. Hence Jesus' cultural truism about marriage: "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mk 10:9). So divorce is not just the separation of two partners but rather the separation of two families.

In a society driven by the values of honor and shame, these conditions (divorce and remarriage) can lead to feuding, bloodshed and shame. Divorce could tear apart the villages in which these families lived and tried to make a living. Hence the basic purpose of these laws and cultural norms in ancient Israelite society was to maintain internal societal harmony and stability.

-- John J. Pilch (a biblical scholar, posted on the Saint Louis University website, see online resources page at the back of this packet)

All were welcome around Jesus. Jesus spoke to Pharisees and children alike, he ate with sinners and leaders, he invited rich and poor, men and women, to gather around him. He touched the unclean and healed the sick. Paul speaks further of what Jesus willingly did to begin the reconciliation and return to a time of harmony. Jesus became less than who he was, and by doing so raised us up. Jesus suffered and died for us so that we could live a new life and a new hope. We must be willing to follow the example of Jesus. People and groups we consider less than ourselves are equal before God. They are our brothers and sisters. We are called to embrace and bless them as Jesus did.

From a Catechumen's Lectionary, edited by Robert H. Hamma, Paulist Press, 1988

Jesus [tells us] that the first thing necessary to pray is to be able to say "Father". Beware: if I am not able to say "Father" to God, I am not capable of praying. We must learn to say, "Father", that is, to place oneself in His presence with filial confidence. But to be able to learn, it is necessary

to recognize humbly that we need to be instructed, and to say with simplicity: Lord, teach me to pray.

This is the first point: to be humble, to recognize ourselves as children, to repose in the Father, to trust in Him. To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must make ourselves small like children. In the sense that children know how to trust, they know that someone will take care of them, of what they will eat, of what they will wear and so on (cf *Mt* 6: 25-32). This is the first attitude: *trust and confidence*, like children towards their parents; knowing that God remembers you and takes care of you, you, me, everyone.

The second predisposition, again typical of children, is to *allow oneself to be surprised*. The child always ask a thousand questions because he wants to discover the world; and he wonders even at little things, because everything is new to him. To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must allow ourselves to be astonished. -- *Pope Francis, General Audience, Nov. 15, 2017*

Saint Spotlight on Thérèse of Lisieux: “St. Therese of the Child Jesus”

Therese is famous for her childlike dependency on the Father, known as her “Little Way”. She describes this dependency: “It is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from its father.” - *St. Therese’s autobiography, Story of a Soul*

“In times of aridity when I am incapable of praying, of practicing virtue, I seek little opportunities, mere trifles, to give pleasure to Jesus; for instance a smile, a pleasant word when inclined to be silent and to show weariness. If I find no opportunities, I at least tell Him again and again that I love Him; that is not difficult and it keeps alive the fire in my heart. Even though this fire of love might seem extinct I would still throw little straws upon the embers and I am certain it would rekindle.”

-*St. Therese, from the XVI letter to her sister Celine*

Optional Poem:

As Your Eyes Danced
I can almost remember
The air full of the desert
And the trudging progress,
The wind scattered by indignant shouts
And the cries of merchants, buyers, sellers,
In the town you passed through that day.
With the crowds pressed in tightly,
And filling the street
With questions and sorrows
And laughing entreaties.

And you were talking
Where the grass mingled
With the road's dirt,
To those who were listening
And those who said they were.
The sun just kept on
Sliding across the sky,
And you were tired
And tired of the frivolous
Rhetorical games
they insisted upon.
And that was when
The little boy tottered through
The circle they'd let stand
Empty around you,
And you noticed him,
And let their questions and their tricks
Slip away.
As you knelt in the dust
And opened your arms,
As he walked into your embrace.
You ran a gentle hand
Through the softness of his hair,
And smiled as his eyes danced with yours.
This, you told us, was the face
Of the kingdom of God.

(Thomas Flowers, *Walking Humbly, Scripture Meditations in Verse*, Paulist Press, 2009)

Discussion questions:

When have you seen the face of God in something as simple as a child, a singing bird, or a fallen leaf?

Do we try to make our faith more complicated than it needs to be? In what ways might we do that?

What does childlike faith look like?

What does Jesus' preference for childlike faith tell us about the importance of humility? How are we to live out Christian humility, mirroring Christ who we read in this week's second reading was "was made 'lower than the angels'"?

How might the Father be asking each of us to depend more fully on him in our day-to-day— to cultivate a relationship with him like that of a child to his or her father?

Closing prayer (or see back pages for other options):

You Have Called Me By Name

Oh, Lord my God, you called me
from the sleep of nothingness merely because of your tremendous love.
You want to make good and beautiful things.
You have called me by name in my mother's womb.
You have given me breath and light and movement
and walked with me every moment of my existence.
I am amazed, Lord God of the universe,
that you attend to me and, more, cherish me.
Create in me the faithfulness that moves you,
and I will trust you and yearn for you all my days. *Amen. (Joseph Tetlow, S.J.)*

Suggested music: Whatever Comes (Rend Collective)