

Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 26th October 2025

Readings: **Joel 2:23-32**

2Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Psalms 65

Luke 18:15-30

There is something highly strategic about the displays we look at when waiting in line at a supermarket check-out. For, on the shelves there are magazines that adults can browse, and at the right height for young children to see there are brightly coloured lollies and chocolates. Last week I was waiting in a queue and at the next check-out there was a toddler demanding that his mum get him a chocolate. It was the classic, red-faced, 'I want that!' routine, and 'I want it now!'

The Mum looked tired and embarrassed as she unloaded her trolley and repeatedly told her boy that she would not be getting him the chocolate. I wanted to clap with affirmation as she stuck to her guns, paid the bill, and wheeled her trolley out... while her son wailed like the world had come to an end!

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus saying to his disciples, *"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..."* (Luke 18:16-17).

This is another one of those instances in which Jesus turned upside down the conventional wisdom of his time. The conventional wisdom that asserted God primarily wants people to keep religious rules; Jesus contradicted by saying that God wants primarily for people to be compassionate. The conventional wisdom about conflict that asserted, *'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!'*; Jesus contradicted by saying, *'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you!'* And, the conventional wisdom that believed lepers and tax-collectors were beyond hope; Jesus contradicted by saying lepers, tax collectors, and a whole lot of other 'undesirables', were God's beloved children!

Conventional wisdom then, and now, suggests that as adults we have the greatest intellectual capacity to make informed decisions about life and faith. As adults we can get a job, drive a car, buy a house, get married, fly an aeroplane, and, in this democratic country, vote for political representation! So, how can we make sense of the assertion, *'...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it'?*

Hopefully, each of us have got some experience of caring for, and of observing, small children. When we reflect on that experience, we might identify qualities which may have diminished in us as we've got older, and I want to highlight three of these.

I have found through the years that small children generally have an extraordinary CURIOSITY. What is that? How does this work? and, Are we there yet? are questions that can come thick and fast. Questions from a child the back seat of a car; from a small face pressed against a window; from an 'expedition' in the garden; from a quiet time of reading; or, from just about anywhere while a child is awake!

Associated with this curiosity there is often a sense of WONDER expressed by children. Variations of 'Wow!' and 'Thank you!' and giggles because there aren't yet words to express what's being felt. Being with a child in such moments can cause us to look with new eyes at things we have previously missed or taken for granted. This includes the beauty of a flower, the brilliance of a beetle, the thrill of holding hands, the joy of a gift... and, the taste of ice cream!

Associated with wonder is the desire to SHARE the new experience with family and friends. So, the flower is broken off and brought into the house to be shown to others! The dead bird with the lovely feathers is carried in reverently... to be shown to others! The piece of paper covered in squiggles, or stick people, or rainbows... is carried home carefully after school... to be shared with others!

So, quite possibly, when Jesus said we need to be like children if we want to receive the Kingdom of God he may have been suggesting that we should be more CURIOUS about everything, as children are! That we should take note of things and WONDER more often, as children do! And, that we should have the confidence to SHARE with others the insight that God is at work in our lives, and in the life of the world!

However, I don't think for one moment that the rich implications of this text are adequately captured in these three suggestions.

Let's go back to that little boy demanding chocolate in the supermarket. He was not expressing curiosity, wonder, or joy... he simply wanted chocolate, no matter what! We may concede that he could have been tired, bored, or that his blood sugar level was low... but, his behaviour was still obnoxious, selfish, and embarrassing! To be fair, it is normal, developmental behaviour in children... but, there could be a gift for us in observing such behaviour and observing the patient and wise responses of parents and care givers.

In the vast majority of cases people don't stop loving their children even though their behaviour is a long way from what is hoped for or desired!

As we get older, I think there is still part of us that wants metaphorical 'chocolate'! We may yearn for things other than chocolate, and we probably hide the yearning better than children, but the principal remains the same. We want it – even though it's not good for us – even though it's not good!

As adults we have the ability to reflect on these yearnings and can feel ashamed. We may not talk about them with others because we don't want them to see the self-interested, unprincipled part of us. But we have a sense that God sees us as we really are, and for many it's hard to imagine, or accept, the reality of God not only knowing us, but continuing to love us... as surely a parent loves their little child.

A little child cannot earn the love of their parents, it simply is... and, so similarly for us we cannot earn God's love, it simply is. Maybe this understanding is another gift from the words, *'Unless we receive the Kingdom of God as a little child we will never enter it.'* We are loved, even though we have weaknesses and yucky stuff going on inside. We are deeply known and are deeply loved... by God.

If, and when, we do accept this I think we can find the freedom to be the people we were made to be. Full of CURIOSITY, not indifference. Full of WONDER, not cynicism. Full of the desire to make a difference, and SHARE the hope and purpose we have found in Christ.

Perhaps we also find then a greater inclination to pray? Please join me as we close in prayer now:

"Loving God, we give thanks for the children who are part of our lives and ask for your blessing on them wherever they are. We also ask for your blessing on the child within us, that yearns for a deeper awareness and knowledge of your love. Through your Spirit, renew our capacity for curiosity and joy and our desire for love and justice so that... your Kingdom may come, and your will be done. Amen."