

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 20, 2009
Deacon Tom Barford

In our Gospel passage for this 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus takes a little child as an example for the twelve and says, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

We, in our time, are enchanted by this and we think of the innocence, the unspoiledness and the trusting nature of a child and how we ought to imitate this in our own lives. We really want to learn from these children how to put our trust in our heavenly Father the way they trust in their parents.

Children were not thought of in the time of Jesus as we think of them today. They were not treasured at an early age nor was there any extra effort to plan for their future. There were a lot more children around but people were so used to the high rate of infant and child mortality that no great expectations could be placed on children since there was no guarantee that they would live till adulthood.

What Jesus is pointing to when he places his hands around the shoulders of that child is the child's lack of status. Children were simply disregarded – they had no opinions worth listening to, they had no power or authority, they had nothing to offer. To show favor to a child was worthless.

There is also a little play on words involved in this passage because in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke, the words servant and child are interchangeable. That in itself reveals how patronizing people must have been towards servants.

Jesus has just been talking to the disciples who were arguing about which should be the greatest. He tells them that if anyone wants to be first he must make himself the servant of all.

Jesus' purpose in this is not to give children a high value but to give high value to the acceptance of all those with very little power. When you accept someone whom everyone else considers of no account; then you are welcoming Jesus himself.

Each person is created by God and is therefore of great worth! The lowest, poorest, most despised human being is a true child of God and the same high price has been paid for them as for you and me - the price of the blood of Jesus himself, the Son of God.

We spend so much energy classifying people. We categorize almost everyone we meet: they are either friend or foe, high class or low class, rich or poor, good or bad, nice or not so nice, to be admired or to be despised. We judge them by their looks, by their company, by their clothing, by where they live, by their color, by the type of car they drive. And in many cases we do all this before we ever speak to them.

But here in this Gospel message, Jesus indicates clearly that this is not what God does. **God values people simply as people!** God draws no distinction between us. God values every single person. And if there is any favor it is clearly directed towards the poor and the despised and the downtrodden – the very ones we consider of less worth than ourselves.

So there you have it!

We Christians must never consider ourselves better than others!

We Christians must never look down on other people!

We Christians must regard ourselves first and foremost as servants of others!

We are to do as Jesus has taught us. We are to bear his name and we are to act on his behalf in the world today. We may hold high office or positions of respect but we are to realize that this does not place us any higher than any of our brothers or sisters in the human family.

We must love the Lord through those whom he loves and this includes the most disregarded souls who walk this earth.