

## Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2008

*“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.”*  
(Mark 10:14)

This homily was delivered at a First Communion Mass.

Those are the words of Christ himself — in the living word of God. We must pay attention to what brought Him to utter these words; we are told in the same scripture that the people “brought to him young children, that he might touch them. And the disciples rebuked them that brought them. Whom when Jesus saw, he was much displeased ...” – it was then He uttered those pleasing words – “And embracing them, and laying his hands upon them, he blessed them.”<sup>1</sup> Let us not forget the reason He does so: “For of such is the kingdom of God” — that kingdom that is a spiritual kingdom; not of this world. And He takes the opportunity to remind us all; prefacing His words with the solemn *Amen* (of a truth), he says: “I say to you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter into it.”



This, of course, does not mean that we should be childish; it clearly shows us that we must believe with the simple untroubled trust that a child has in his father; willingly to allow himself to be taken by the hand and led to wherever the loving father leads him. So we must allow ourselves to be led by our Saviour who leads us to the heavenly Father where lies our destiny. Our Lord is quick to show the confidence that children have in the truths and promises of God which they learn from their parents. On Sunday last we spoke of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem — not merely because the glory of it would be destroyed, but because of what brought about that destruction. And it is children again that give us the example. The children of Jewish families were brought up to believe in the Covenant — the promise to Abraham, which they were reminded of every day in the family by the reading of the messianic prophecies. And so when Christ was entering Jerusalem on what we now call the first Palm Sunday, they had so often heard the prophecy “Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold thy King cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt of the foal of her that is used to the yoke” went wild with joy as soon as they saw him, and began to hail Him as the One who cometh in the name of the Lord. And they kept this up even after they had entered into the Temple, because they saw the wonderful things that He did. The chief priests and scribes also saw the wonderful things that He did but their re-action was so different. They were filled with indignation at the children crying and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” And they rebuked Jesus, saying, “Don’t

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:13-16

you hear what these say?” — to which he replied: “Yea, have you never read: Out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise?”<sup>2</sup> In another scripture, Christ says to similar hard-hearted people: “I say to you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out.”<sup>3</sup> It was this hardness of heart of those who were well versed in the prophecies – who had all the evidence by which they could recognise Christ when He should come – that caused Him to weep over the Holy City.

And do we not have an example closer to home: Little Nellie of Holy God, an unfortunate child failing in health and placed as an orphan with the Good Shepherd sisters at Sunday’s Well in Cork. She played with a small statue of the Child Jesus; indeed she claimed that He danced for her. Most of this was taken as childish romancing. But then she showed she knew that Holy God was in the Tabernacle; when she was four she continually wanted to receive Holy God. Eventually one of the Sisters wrote to the Pope, Pius X. He replied giving permission for her to make her first Holy Communion. This also led to His changing the law so that children could make first confession and first Holy Communion at six or seven years of age — the “use of reason”. Little Nellie made her first Holy Communion the following Christmas; and not very long after that she entered into Communion with our Lord in Heaven.

God be with the days when babes in arms were introduced to Holy God through the Image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the home. So much of what Christ was teaching us we saw when such tiny children were asked “Where is Holy God?” and in their father’s arms they would twist themselves round and point a baby hand to the picture of the love of God revealed through the Sacred Heart.

A few words to our first communicant, and to all who receive Holy Communion: When Our Lord first gave us the true Bread from Heaven, at the Last Supper, He used unleavened bread made from wheaten flour and water — and it was white, flat and tasteless. Divine Wisdom did not want us to receive because it gave pleasure to our sense of taste, but that we should know we are receiving Holy God. We should then receive the Sacred Host reverently, and slowly and gently swallow it; at the same time thanking Him and welcoming Holy God into our hearts. And we should ask Him to let us taste the sweetness of His loving presence and to know all the heavenly delights of His great love for us; a love that He brings into our own hearts, so that we may love like Him. Little ones should be taught to pray the Rosary, it is never too early to learn — “Faith comes by hearing.” The beautiful gift of intelligence in the pure soul of a baptised baby is a mystery we will not understand, but the Holy Ghost is dwelling in the innocent soul throughout those years of innocence; this should not be forgotten and should not be lost; consecrate them every day to their blessed Mother and she will bless you in return. May she keep us all and help us to be as children in our love of God so as to be truly citizens of His Kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 21:16

<sup>3</sup> Lk. 19:40