

Baby worship, anyone?

For Jesus, relationships and the vulnerable are always more important

Community

Religion

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3 min read



“Children point us heavenward by virtue of their authentic and simple way of being, their sheer lack of presumptuousness, as in their attitude of relating with the world around them with a renewed sense of awe” – G. K. Chesterton

Today's readings: Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16

In his fascinating short essay ‘In Defence of Baby Worship’, the British author and Catholic convert G. K. Chesterton gives us some good reasons why children are our best teachers. The “influence of children” as they stand in awe of everything that crosses their gaze, says

Chesterton, “forces us actually to remodel our conduct in accordance with the revolutionary theory of the marvellousness of all things”.

For Chesterton, children point us heavenward by virtue of their authentic and simple way of being, their sheer lack of presumptuousness, as in their attitude of relating with the world around them with a renewed sense of awe.

This is the interpretative lens with which we ought to read today’s gospel. The issue at stake is a theological dispute on divorce that the Pharisees want to pick with Jesus. This group of self-righteous men is seeking to set a snare for the unconventional rabbi to see which school of thought he follows. He, however, has no intention of giving in to the Pharisees’ game of what Pope Francis would call “discussing theology over tea”. Instead, he gives them a lecture in life by reminding them where the crux of their theologising must be: the vulnerable in their midst.

Jesus does not seek to gain praise and popularity among the dominant classes by stretching liberty beyond its limits at the expense of those who are in a position of lesser power. Instead, he goes to the core of the issue. For Jesus, relationships always take the place of primacy.

It would serve us well to keep Jesus’s attitude clear in our mind when dealing with delicate issues that make for good theological discussions but for poor sensitivity. Like the Pharisees, we tend to forget that at the heart of these issues are vulnerable people who are passing through painful situations often shrouded by shame and many deep-seated hurts.

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Today's first reading sets the tone to Jesus's reply by highlighting the sacredness of relationships, which we glean from the first pages of Genesis that we are all familiar with.

God creates man because God-who-is-Communion could not spend eternity without sharing Godself's own life with others. In similar fashion, the newly-created man is restless until he finds a suitable partner with whom to share his life. His delight and long-sought-after joy of finding an equal and mutual partner are strongly palpable: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

Jesus recalls these words to remind his interlocutors of the sacredness of our relationality. His words fly in the face of individualism that can threaten even the most stable of relationships. Jesus's words on the sacredness of the relationship between man and woman in marriage are a stark reminder that spouses cannot be treated as property to be used and taken advantage of, or discarded and dismissed at whim. Indeed, nobody is disposable.

But Jesus's most eloquent response to the Pharisee's question is what he does next. While the disciples shoo children away, Jesus beckons them and points at them as models to imitate for those who want to reach the Kingdom of God.

Facile calculations of how much we can have of our way while also securing a place in heaven will not get us anywhere.

Chesterton's children show us another way: "Their top-heavy dignity is more touching than any humility; their solemnity gives us more hope for all things than a thousand carnivals of optimism; their large and lustrous eyes seem to hold all the stars in their astonishment; their fascinating absence of nose seems to give to us the most perfect hint of the humour that awaits us in the kingdom of heaven."

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