

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

October 3, 2021 • 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 10:13–16

Let the Children Come To Me

People began to bring their children to Jesus so that he could bless them. The disciples rebuked them thinking Jesus had better things to do. Jesus became indignant and told them to let the children come to him for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

When Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children, I think the youngsters he has in mind are those wide-eyed tykes whose faces tell you just how they feel.

You know the type—the little ones who pull on your hand and stretch your arm in their eagerness to get somewhere. I think children like this must come from homes where they are loved and really cared for. They live their lives certain that comfort and safety are no farther away than a parent's lap.

Childhood, particularly early childhood, can be a scary time—a time of almost total dependence. Left on his own, a three-year-old's life would be extremely hazardous. But then again, left on our own, we could all find life pretty treacherous—whether we're three, thirty-three or sixty-three.

Perhaps that is what Jesus is trying to tell us. Life is not easy: It is filled with all sorts of obstacles and problems, but no matter our age, we are all children, children of God.

We, too, need to live our lives aware that when we are open to God's love, we are safe and secure, loved and cared for, always close to the lap of God.

When we realize and accept our dependency on an all-loving God and accept God's love, we can

glide through some of our fear and insecurity. We can let that wide-eyed, smiling child inside each of us come out to play.

Continually remind yourself of God's promise to be with you always. Let the child in you out, and spend time as a family playing together. Reach for your child's hand, stretching his arm in your eagerness to share God's love through your own laughter and joy.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Take turns naming your favorite family fun-time activities. Find time within the next two weeks to enjoy as many of these activities as possible. Mark them on your calendar.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

What is your favorite family activity? How can you find more time to have fun with your family? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

October 10, 2021 • 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 10:17-30

Justice for All

A young man who had many riches approaches Jesus and asks him what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus tells him to keep the commandments, the man replies that he has observed them from his youth. Jesus' next request is not as easy for the rich man to accomplish.

Once again, we see Jesus' concern for the poor. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor...then come follow me. Jesus asks us not just to give from our own pockets, but also to truly identify with the poor. Christian love requires more than charity. It demands empathy and a willingness to fight for justice.

When Jesus spoke of justice he was talking about treating people fairly, honoring commitments, setting things right and definitely justice for all. His sense of righteousness went beyond a legalistic understanding of reward and punishment. It involved relieving suffering, healing relationships and making sure everyone was fed. It is this broader understanding of justice that we are asked to mirror in our own lives and help our children hunger and thirst for in theirs.

Children seem to develop a sense of righteousness at an early age, but it is usually centered on themselves. As they grow, they become concerned about fair treatment for friends and loved ones. It is our job to help them to eventually develop empathy for people they don't know.

We can help youngsters appreciate basic justice by rewarding and disciplining them fairly, but we must also foster a broader understanding and a more active approach. Listen intently as they talk

about their own experiences of injustice and those of their friends, pray about the situation and work out possible solutions. Later, call attention to injustices in the larger community and follow the same steps. Coming to appreciate "justice for all" is a gradual process that begins at home and leads to every corner of the world.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Go through the newspaper, a news magazine or watch the evening news together. Find one news story from your community or the larger world, talk about and decide if there is anything you can do to help. Say a prayer asking for God's help.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

If you could choose one particular area of need to volunteer in, what would it be? What is keeping you from giving your time now? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

October 17, 2021 • 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 10:35–45

Called to Be Servants

Once again the apostles are jousting for who will be first in Jesus' eyes. This time James and John want to have the choice seat next to Jesus when he comes to his glory. Once again Jesus tells them they are not to be like the Gentiles and lord it over others.

Jesus' message is pretty clear. We are all called to be servants. This is no big deal for those of us who are married. Like most wives, I experience the call almost daily—when I put on the coffee, retrieve the newspaper, fix a dinner or make a bed. For those of us who have children, the list multiplies a hundredfold. For the most part I do my chores willingly, sometimes lovingly, but at other times...

Usually, I can accept the role of servant without even thinking about it, but there are other times when my response to the call is anything but loving. In my many years as wife and mother, my spouse and children have occasionally heard me say loud and clear, "I'm not your servant."

Should I feel guilty? Maybe once in a while, but for the most part my guilt is eased when I remember there is mutuality to Jesus' call. As wife and mom I'm doing my husband and children a disservice if I don't give them an opportunity to serve also. Perhaps shouting is not the gentlest way of promoting our common call. It would be much better to have family meetings and decide together who does what—and stick to it.

This may occasionally mean having a table not quite set, food served lukewarm and a bathroom that may not meet a white glove

inspection. Resist the urge to do it over or do it yourself. Continue to stand by and instruct. Consider Jesus, it took him three years to get the apostles to comprehend the idea of servant leadership.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Talk about how household chores are divided up in your family. Are there any adjustments needed? What would make getting daily chores done more fun?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Is everyone doing his or her share of work around the house? Which of your daily chores do you find most burdensome? Is there any way of making it less of a burden? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

October 24, 2021 • 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 10:46–52

Jesus Calling

Jesus is being followed by a large group of people. A blind man, Bartimaeus, wants to get through the crowd, but can't break their ranks. Finally, one of Jesus' followers approaches the man telling him that Jesus wants to see him.

Just for a moment consider what you would do if you heard that Jesus was calling you. Imagine yourself sitting in a church or in a park. You see a large group of people who are obviously spellbound and in awe of the person who is speaking.

Someone leaves the group and comes up to you. He tells you Jesus wants to see you. How would you feel? How would you approach Jesus? What would you say to him? What would you ask for?

Reflecting on such questions is called meditation, and it is a form of praying. It involves taking some time to think about Scripture, asking yourself some questions and reflecting on your response. Your answers can tell you a lot about yourself, and about your life situation. They can also say much about your relationship with Jesus. You can teach your child how to pray in this way by doing the exercise together.

Consider incorporating meditation with the two other forms of prayer; vocal prayer and contemplative prayer. Vocal prayer is praying with words that are your own or another's. Contemplative prayer is the prayer of silence, just sitting quietly with God, not even thinking.

You can employ all three prayer forms and engage in the centuries-old prayer exercise, Lectio

Divina. Read the Scripture out loud. Put yourself in the story and consider how you would respond. Finally, take some quiet time to just sit in silence, letting your thoughts rest in God. End by saying a prayer together, or decide on an action you will do together.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Try praying together using the Lectio Divina. Follow the suggestions in the last paragraph of the reflection below. Ask family members to comment on what the experience was like for them.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Take a moment and read the Scripture passage Mark 10:46–52 again. After you have read it ask yourself the questions from the reflection above. Sit quietly with your answers. What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

October 31, 2021 • 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 12:28-34

To Know, Know, Know Him Is to Love, Love, Love Him

In this reading a scribe asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. When Jesus answers the question, the scribe makes it clear he understands and agrees with what Jesus has said. Jesus' answer was so impressive that no one dared to question him after that.

In this Gospel all Ten Commandments are summed up in just two statements. First, we are to know and love God with all our heart, understanding and strength. The second is like the first; Jesus tells us we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus makes sure that those listening recognize the fact that understanding these two commandments is more important than any prayers or offerings and will lead to the kingdom of God.

The two commandments Jesus gives us can really be seen as just one. When we come to know and love God, we open ourselves to God's love. Filled with God's love we have no choice but to share that love with others. Experiencing God's love, which is unconditional and all consuming, enables us to love ourselves and everyone else. To come to know and love God is to come to know and love all others and ourselves.

The key is to be open to discovering who God is over and over again in our lifetime. Since we never outgrow our need to learn about God, we must continue to pray, study and talk to people, sharing our image of God and listening to theirs. God is and will always be a mystery, but the mystery that

is God continually reaches out to us, asking us to reach back.

I remember the lines to a popular song when I was growing up, "To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him." Those words are certainly true of God. We need to grow in our understanding of God so that we can grow in our capacity to love. And as parents, our job is to help our children do the same, praying, studying and listening to them share their ideas about God and sharing our own ideas with them.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Have paper and pencils ready and ask each person to draw a picture of how they "see" God. Talk about what you have drawn.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

How does God fit into your everyday life right now? Who is God in your life today? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

November 7, 2021 • 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 12:38-44

Living Life With a Generous Heart

Jesus mentions widows twice in this reading. The first time is when he strongly criticizes the scribes for walking around in fine robes while they “devour widows’ houses” (v. 40) The second reference is when he points out a generous widow who puts her whole livelihood into the collection.

The widow in this Gospel was certainly a woman of faith and an example to all of us. However, I don't think Jesus is telling us that we are all expected to give away everything we have and just trust in him. This is what he told the rich man, of course, and what he seems to be praising in this story of the widow.

But the call to poverty is a specific call and not one that all of us are meant to live. What I do think Jesus expects of us is to live our lives with a generous heart and with the same faith the widow had as she gave her last two coins away. There is a clear message here that we are not to live like the scribes, enjoying the high life, driving expensive cars, wearing fine clothes at the expense of other people. Jesus is also quite clear about sharing what we have with those who are in need. We are not to give just from the extra money we have, the surplus, but also from our bounty. It may not be necessary to give everything away, but we should give away enough to at least feel the pinch.

Jesus also calls us to live our lives poor in spirit, not getting too comfortable with what we have or what we earn. Financial security is no longer a given reality even for folks who work hard, have a dozen degrees and have served a company loyally for

years. The widow gave up her livelihood willingly, but in today's economic world some of us are forced into that situation involuntarily. Like the widow, we need to know that no matter what happens we will be OK. We need her faith in a God who always provides.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Ask everyone to go through their toys or clothes and choose at least two things they can give to people in need. When they have finished, gather again and talk about what you are giving away. Make sure you are giving from your bounty and not just your surplus.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Have you ever had to live without some of the daily essentials of life? How did you cope? How do you think you would cope? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

November 14, 2021 • 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time • Mark 13:24–32

God Only Knows

In this Gospel we find another scary reading about the end times. Jesus tells his disciples that the moon will not give light and the stars will fall from the heavens. He tells his followers that while there may be signs, only God knows when the last days will be.

We don't have to focus on the end times to experience the feeling of fear and anxiety today. Just living in the everyday of this uncertain world can cause the same concern. So how do we learn to live with this uncertainty? Consider what it is like when a woman is preparing to give birth to a child.

I remember my ninth month of pregnancy, the Christmas before Phillip was born. He was due at the beginning of January. He was our fourth child. Roger Andy was six, Kristin was two, and James was a year. Strangely enough, getting ready for both Christmas and a new baby seemed to help me focus on getting things done.

It was probably the only year I was really ready for Christmas. I was so afraid I would go into labor early that my presents were bought and wrapped, cards were signed and addressed and cookies were baked by mid-December. My house was in order every day because I knew that as soon as I went into the hospital my mom would be coming down from Chicago to help with the kids.

That year I really enjoyed the Christmas season because everything was done and I was ready. I remember sitting with my feet up sipping hot cocoa listening to carols and watching the children play.

That was the one and only year I kept a daily journal for a few months. It was such a good feeling being ready—a feeling I had rarely experienced before and hardly ever experienced afterward.

I think that is the peace and joy Jesus wants us to experience as we live every day in these scary, uncertain times. We focus on what needs to be done and get it done. We get ourselves and our lives ready for whatever, whenever, and enjoy the present moment knowing that uncertainty is part of life.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Have everyone answer the following question: If you had only ten minutes to grab the things you wanted to take on a very long trip, what would you make sure to take?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Other than your family members, what things are most valuable to you in your home? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

November 21, 2021 • Our Lord Jesus Christ, King • John:18:33-37

Proclaiming the Kingdom

On this feast of Christ the King we read John's account of Jesus before Pilate. The Roman leader is the only one who can condemn Jesus to death; the priests and scribes do not have that power. So they bring Jesus to Pilate and accuse him of treason.

On this last Sunday of the church year we celebrate Christ the King. It is an appropriate way to commemorate all that Jesus is and all that he did. It is a celebration of the kingdom of

God proclaimed and lived by Jesus, our brother and savior. The best way to celebrate this great feast is by following Jesus' example and living our lives proclaiming the kingdom.

Often when we talk about God's kingdom we focus on heaven, our afterlife. We have learned from childhood that if we are good, obey the commandments and live in God's light, when we die we will go to heaven. In heaven we will spend eternity with God and all his saints and angels. All of this is true of course, but it is a very limited view of the kingdom of God.

God's kingdom is much more than a place where we spend forever. God's kingdom is also present today, here and anywhere, any time God's will can be found. Jesus lived the kingdom because he lived in absolute truth and love. He reconciled and healed; he preached the good news and loved as only God can love. Like Jesus, Christians are expected to be kingdom builders too.

As parents, we are called to do our best to build the kingdom of God in our own homes. We are asked to reconcile and heal, speak only the truth and love as God loves. It seems an impossible task, and it would be if it weren't for our faith in Jesus. The secret is to ask God to fill us with his love and his strength so that every cell and fiber of our being will respond and react as Jesus would. If we live with this intention, God's kingdom is sure to come.

FAMILY RESPONSE

Discuss how your family can make your home more like the kingdom of God.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

What concrete steps can you take to be a kingdom builder at home and in the larger world? What do you want to remember from last week? What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?