



Today we come to the fourth of the five discourses which are the distinctive characteristic of Matthew's gospel.

So it begins by asking the question: Who is the greatest in the Kingdom and, by implication, in the Christian community, which is a sign of the Kingdom? Jesus answers the question very simply by putting a child in front of his disciples. To become the greatest is to become a small child.

Here are a few synonyms that most likely apply to Jesus' definition of becoming like children: **trusting, dependent, natural, spontaneous, awe-inspired, without airs, and innocent.** Perhaps some of these, or all of them, would qualify for what Jesus is talking about.

Though they are intellectually and emotionally immature, children have some precious qualities as mentioned above which they often lose as they grow up.

A critical danger in the process of 'growing- up' is the tendency to lose our 'natural child-like' qualities.

1. As a child, we were free to express our emotions, but when we "grow up", we tend to hold them up all within (only to burst out one day!).
2. As a child, we were easily dependent on those who cared for us, but when we "grow up", we become arrogant towards them and seek 'independence'.
3. As a child, we were able to enjoy and relax in the present moment... but when we "grow up", we get caught up in the snare of the past and shrink with fear of the future.

The Lord invites us to get back the "lost" child-like faith and trust. We need to realize that we are always little children to our Heavenly Father! He loves to care for us... He longs that we depend on Him entirely! Yes, children sometimes teach elders great lessons, isn't it?

These little ones, not only children but also adults and underprivileged section in the community, mentioned in the Gospel reading are the weaker ones in the community. But they are the ones who can very easily be led astray by the bad example which others give. Jesus says that there are severe penalties for doing this (mentioned in the omitted passage). So we are called to protect children and adults from any danger and guide them to experience and grow in God's presence and "fear of God" and we being a good example to them.

Lastly, God is compared to a shepherd who has lost just one sheep out of a hundred. When he finds it again, he is happier than over the other ninety-nine which has not strayed. Such, the gospel concludes, is the desire of God, that not even one of the 'little ones' be lost.

Life Messages:

1. Since children reflect the innocence, purity, simplicity, and tenderness of our Lord, and since they are each given the protection of a guardian angel, we are to love them, train them and take care not to give scandal to them.
2. We need to try to treat everyone with love and respect because "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life,".

Let us pray:

Lord, help me to become childlike. Help me to find true greatness in the humility and simplicity of a child. Let me become an instrument in protecting the little ones as you desire.

Jesus, I Trust In You.