



Fr. Laurence Kriegshauser
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2009

Jesus gives us a lesson in true greatness. He places a child in the midst of the disputing disciples. The child is defenseless, dependent, not in charge of others. Is Jesus asking us to be like a child? Yes. We are to recognize our need, to trust in a loving father, and not to seek control over others. This Jesus explicitly says elsewhere in the Gospels. But here the child has a different meaning. Jesus speaks not of being like the child but of receiving one such child as this in his name. His disciples are not to be in the business of ordering people around even for good ends, but to be open to the needs of the helpless, to make it their agenda to “receive” or “welcome” the child, the defenseless, needy one.

This is a lesson we all have to learn. It is a matter of finding Christ in the poor and the sick and the undeveloped and the ignorant and making oneself the servant of their needs. The Christian does not try to impose great programs of reform so much as to open his heart to the needs of concrete persons and minister to them. The Christian is to regard himself as the servant of the needy, whether it’s a parent serving his child, a teacher ministering to her students, a caregiver ministering to his patients, a family member caring for a failing parent or spouse. The Christian gospel gives us the great opportunity of finding Christ in the needy person around us. “Putting his arms around the child, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.’” We don’t have to look in heaven for Christ, he comes to us in the child, in the needy, asking us to serve and love him there. By doing that we receive into our hearts not only Christ but the one who sent him, the Father himself.

This openness to the child requires great emptiness in ourselves, an ability to place our own agendas in the larger context of the needs of others. We need to become vulnerable, our time not our own, our hearts touched by the needs of others, if we are to grow spiritually. The service of Christ in the needy evokes our powers of compassion, gentleness, patience, active service, and joy. This is the “wisdom that comes from above” of which Saint James speaks—“peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.” It is the opposite of the greed, ambition, and jealousy that can drive us. Christian maturity means becoming this kind of person rather than accomplishing great deeds. As Pope Benedict taught in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, it is love that people long for, not just the satisfaction of physical needs. “Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.” Our vocation is to minister the compassion of Christ to others.

And there you see the paradox. By letting ourselves be affected by the needs of the child, we recognize that we too are children, not in control of our own fate but receiving from God the very love that we minister to others. The Pope says, “Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.” So Christ is found both in the child whom one receives and in the one who receives the child. We are all children of God, brothers and sisters helping one another, with Christ, our eldest brother, in our midst, present in each of those who form his Body on earth. The sacraments give us the power to surrender our drive for complete autonomy



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to Jesus, to allow him to harness our potencies for the building up of his kingdom. They give us the power to serve and so to reign with Christ.

We Christians have not just a program to give to the world; we have the divine power that transforms hearts. We need to be enthusiastic about that, to tell others about it, to invite them into this love poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, the Spirit who makes us sons and daughters of God in Christ.