

Meditations: Saturday of the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the seventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the Kingdom of God belongs to the childlike; a path of spiritual childhood; becoming childlike requires maturity.

- The Kingdom of God belongs to the childlike
- A path of spiritual childhood
- Becoming childlike requires maturity

IN JESUS' time, it was common for synagogue leaders to bless children, as well as for parents to bless their children and teachers their disciples. So it was natural for Jesus' listeners to bring their children to the Master, asking Him to take them in his arms and bless them. However, the disciples thought that this well-intentioned gesture was out of place. Perhaps they considered it was an interruption to be avoided; they scolded the people trying to approach Christ. The Gospel tells us that *when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it' (Mk 10:13-15).*

We have to realize how children were thought of in ancient times: they were of very little account, and no one would have argued that someone could learn from a child. But "how important children are in the eyes of Jesus!" St. John Paul II exclaims. "We could even say that the Gospel is full of the truth about children. The whole of the Gospel could actually be read as the 'Gospel of children.' What does it mean that 'unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven'? Is not Jesus pointing to children as models even for grown-ups? In children there is something that must never be missing in people who want to enter the kingdom of heaven. People who are destined to go to heaven are simple like children, and like children are full of trust, rich in goodness and pure."^[1]

"Don't try to be grown-up. A child, always a child," St. Josemaría advised. "Your sad experience of each day is full of stumbles and falls. — What would become of you if you were not continually more of a child? Don't want to be grown-up. Be a child; and when you stumble, may you be lifted by the hand of your Father-God." ^[2]

"WE ARE living now in an age of inventions," wrote St. Thérèse of Lisieux in the late 19th century, "and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. I searched, then, in the Scriptures for some sign of this

elevator, the object of my desires, and I read these words coming from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom: 'Whoever is a little one, let him come to me' (*Prov 9:4*)."^[3]

God revealed to St. Thérèse that becoming little is a path to holiness: "I have always wanted to be a saint," she wrote on another occasion. "Alas! I have always noticed that when I compare myself to the saints, there is between them and me the same difference that exists between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and the obscure grain of sand trampled underfoot by passers-by. Instead of becoming discouraged, I said to myself: God cannot inspire unrealizable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness."^[4]

St. Josemaría had similar experiences in his life, though with different nuances and accents. He

dedicated an entire chapter of *The Way* to considerations about spiritual childhood. The founder of Opus Dei always saw himself as a child before God, an inadequate instrument who, nevertheless, felt safe in the arms of his Heavenly Father. "No matter what the situation, my prayer, while varying in tone, has always been the same. I have said to him: 'Lord, You put me here. You entrusted me with this or that, and I put my trust in you. I know you are my Father, and I have seen that tiny children are always absolutely sure of their parents.'"^[5] — He also recommended, "Be very childlike! the more childlike, the better. (...) Believe me, it is the best way to conquer pride; and it's the only way to make our conduct good, great hearted, divine."^[6] —

"WAY OF childhood. Abandonment. Spiritual infancy. All this is not utter nonsense, but a sturdy and solid Christian life."^[7] Becoming children in front of God is far from sentimentality or childishness: "it demands a strong will, proven maturity, an open and firm character."^[8] The life of spiritual childhood "presupposes a living faith in the existence of God, practical surrender to his power and mercy, confident recourse to the Providence of Him who gives us his grace to avoid all evil and attain every good."^[9]

The person who embarks on this path should prepare their heart to receive God's gifts and acquire the virtues of a child: "To become children we must renounce our pride and self-sufficiency, recognizing that we can do nothing by ourselves. We must realize that we need grace, and the help of God our Father to find our

way and keep to it. To be little, you have to abandon yourself as children do, believe as children believe, beg as children beg."^[10]

"And we learn all this through contact with Mary. Devotion to our Lady is not something soft and sentimental. It fills the soul with consolation and joy to precisely the extent that it means a deep act of faith making us go outside ourselves and put our hope in the Lord. (...) Because Mary is our mother, devotion to her teaches us to be authentic sons."^[11]

^[1] St. John Paul II, Letter to Children, 13 December 1994.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 870.

^[3] St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*, Manuscript C, 2v. 3r.

^[4] Ibid.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 143.

^[6] Ibid, no. 147.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 853.

^[8] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 10.

^[9] Pope Benedict XV, Address, 14 August 1921.

^[10] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 143.

^[11] Ibid.