

Sunday Homily

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

5 JULY 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.”

Illustration

Childhood is, of course, a vital and complicated time. It can also be a time of contradiction. Children can be very kind, but they can also be very cruel. They can be very generous, but they can also be very selfish and greedy. Friendships started in childhood may fade away, or they can last for a whole lifetime.

There are, we might say, two aspects to being a child. One we might call being childish. The other we might call being childlike. The first we hope to grow out of, the second we hope will flourish into a mature and authentic way of adulthood, especially in our relationship with God. In her spiritual autobiography St Thérèse of Lisieux recalled the more childish aspects of her character: tears and tantrums, self-will, wanting her own way. Once, when presented with a basket of toys and asked to choose, she cried, “I choose it all!”

Sadly, our society seems to want to keep us in our childish ways. It promises instant gratification, rights without obligations, and makes an idol out of being a permanent adolescent. It is this sort of childishness that St Paul talks about when he says, “When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me.”

Being childlike is different, and refers to the positive side of childhood where we learn to trust, to love, to make friends and to ask big questions. When playing with her brother Rodrigo when they were children, Teresa of Ávila used to wonder what God was like, and what eternity would be like. It is of this childlikeness that Jesus says, “I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Gospel Teaching

It is exactly this childlike quality, and also the gift of friendship, that Jesus is referring to in the Gospel reading. We are privileged to hear this prayer of Christ to the Father. During the prayer we even get a mention. We, and the whole Church, are the ones to whom the saving truth of the Trinity has been revealed. This is because Christ has made us his friends. Elsewhere Jesus says, “I call you

friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.” By the gift of the Spirit we are given the childlike attitude of trust and acceptance needed in order for us to be transformed by Christ’s teaching. The love of the Father, Son and Spirit is opened up to us and we are invited to take part in it, to become part of it.

A key word in Jesus’ prayer is “learn”. He asks us to cooperate in being taught by him. This works at several levels. We are asked to listen and hear the teaching that Christ gives us: his teaching about the Father and the Spirit, his teaching about himself, his teaching about the sacraments, resurrection and eternal life. By this learning our minds are made holy.

We are also called to learn how to put these teachings into practice. St Paul talks about living in the Spirit, about the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Application

Jesus invites us to put his “yoke” on our shoulders. Normally being yoked may not seem an attractive option: it implies forced labour and servitude. But Christ’s yoke is light because the gift of the Spirit moves us to enjoy carrying out the will of God, even though at times we fail.

“My yoke is easy and my burden light,” Christ says to us. His commandments are not complicated and burdensome: Jesus asks us simply to love God, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. In doing this, we are following him, we are loving as Christ has loved us; and we can know that, as we do so, he himself will help us to shoulder the yoke. Compared to the complicated and constant requirements of the old law, Christ’s yoke is very light.

As St Thomas Aquinas put it, the commandments of the new law are fewer and easier to carry out than those of the old! By his incarnation Christ teaches us all these things and allows us to begin, even in this life, to enjoy friendship with God which will blossom completely in eternity.