

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Aug 17th 2013

The narrative in today's Gospel is frequently depicted in paintings, which evoke emotions and thoughts associated with innocence, nurturing, and caring. We may think of Christ blessing innocent children and encouraging us of being a blessing to them. We may think of the Kingdom of God promised to those who keep some sort of innocence. While such thoughts are appropriate, they do not highlight other meanings and messages implicit in this narrative of Christ praying for children.

Throughout the Old and the New Testament, references to children are often times references to those who have no power, who need others to protect them, and who will not survive unless someone cares for and nurtures them. In the Sacred Scriptures, children often stand for the weak, powerless, marginalized and disenfranchised in society. In other words, this Gospel narrative is not primarily a sentimental story about innocence but is part of the social teaching of Christ. We should not be like the Apostles in this Gospel, who did not permit the weak and powerless to get closer to Christ and receive his blessing. Instead, we should facilitate that particularly the marginalized receive Christ's blessing and receive his blessing and support through our prayer and social engagement. Such an understanding allows us to connect this Gospel story to the first reading. God has liberated Israel from Egypt; he has shown his blessings to the underdog in the Egyptian society. The people of Israel recognized that God liberated them and, when asked by Joshua, "decide today whom you will serve," they answered, "far be it from us to forsake the Lord for the service of other gods. For it was the Lord, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery." The enslaved Israel was liberated by God. Similarly, Christ promises to the weak, powerless, and marginalized – the children in the Gospel – liberation from whatever makes their life difficult and cumbersome. He promises them ultimately the Kingdom of God.

Pope Francis recently applied the message of today's readings to contemporary society. He said the following during a visit to Brazil: "The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need."

Let us pray for the Church to be committed to protecting the weak, supporting the powerless, and improving the well-being of the marginalized.

Let us pray for ourselves that we recognize the weak, powerless, and marginalized around us, welcome them into our lives, and use our prayer, skills, and expertise to improve their well-being.

Alex Roedlach