

27 Sunday B

October 3, 2021

St. Patrick

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We're right in the middle of the first of the four gospels. It became the first catechism of the early church, in which Jesus turns everything upside down. Three times he teaches his apostles that he would be tortured and killed. Only then could there be new life. Three times Jesus teaches about the cross. He then turns everything upside down when he also turns it on his disciples—then, and now: **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”** (Mark 8:34).

In this main section of St Mark's Gospel, Jesus really turns things upside down in today's Gospel. Not about marriage and divorce, which got most of our attention as we just heard it proclaimed. No, the hardest section to take in and make it our own comes at the very end of today's Gospel. Jesus puts small children at the center of the kingdom. You see, in his time children had no importance whatsoever. Jesus really shakes up things when he teaches, **“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”**

Our smallest children are trusting. They have no power and are defenseless. In fact, more often than we want to admit, small children can be targets of abuse—abuse in all its ugliness, physical, emotional, and yes, sexual. (We rightly cannot fathom that such child abuse has been carried out by clergy—clergy within our Catholic communion.) Children are vulnerable.

And yes, small children know how to receive a gift, accept the gift...and enjoy it. Three weeks ago, when we began the new year of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, I visited the youngest group—four-and five-year-olds. At the start we all sat down on the floor with our legs crossed. The children did it easily. (Actually, I had little problem getting on the floor and crossing my legs; however, when it was time to get up, I thought I would need a crane to lift me up!)

Paula, together with the other catechist Marilyn, was welcoming the children and introducing them to prayer. Then, Ollie, one of the children pointed to the picture hanging on the wall nearby, and said, “That's a shepherd!”

“Catechesis of the Good *Shepherd*.” That’s what our formation of our children is called. Even the smallest of our children get it! Just as the shepherd puts the youngest lamb around his/her neck, so that the lamb can get to know the shepherd’s voice, and become at ease with the shepherd’s smell, our children trust easily that Jesus knows them and calls each of them by name. Our smallest children experience that Jesus loves them, and that they don’t even have to earn that love. It’s a gift, and they need only to accept the gift graciously.

Yes, St. Patrick’s, Jesus turns everything upside down in this middle section of St. Mark’s Gospel. The smallest of children are the first in Jesus’ eyes. They’re first in the Kingdom of God. They don’t earn it. It’s Jesus’ gift.

I’m not programmed like that. I—we—are called to change. We’re not the teachers of our smallest children. No, *they* can teach us, they having within them the Spirit of the living God.

By grace, may we trust just as does a four-year-old, taking Jesus on his word. By grace, can we graciously accept Jesus’ love for us, and always know that we never earn it? It’s his gift—to all who receive it like the smallest child.

*General Intercessions*

*October 3, 2021*

*27<sup>TH</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*

**Grace us that we might receive the Kingdom of God “as a little child”—gratefully and joyfully; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**For married persons; for widows and widowers; for the separated or divorced; for single people; and for all who seek to make a home; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Bring justice and healing to those children who have suffered abuse—sexually, emotionally, physically; and free that scourge from within the church; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**During this “Respect for Life” month of October, instill a consistent reverence within us, countering violence in our schools and everyday life, as well as the death penalty and the violence of war, and upholding the dignity of the unborn and their mothers; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Inspire all of us to show care in safeguarding others from the Delta variant; and give healing to all who suffer from the pandemic; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Grant eternal life to all who have died with their hope fixed on you, especially as we remember Joe Barnett; we pray to you, O Lord—**

