

14th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “A”

July 5-6, 2014

You have revealed them to little ones.

Readings: Zechariah 9: 9-10; Romans 8: 9, 11-13; Matt. 11:25-30

Priests have often been privileged to be present at some significant spiritual moments in the lives of their people. Anyone who has worked in a parish for any length of time has seen this; this does not only concern the adult or senior far advanced in the spiritual life. It even concerns the young. We have all been moved by the level of faith that is occasionally demonstrated by the lives of young people.

So when our Gospel indicates that the Father has revealed hidden things to the “little ones,” we must see in this an invitation to look more closely at this text. There has long been a tendency for people to become turned in upon themselves spiritually, believing that only the more advanced and educated members of the clergy and laity are really capable of understanding the fullness of truth.

I recall attending the 1997 World Youth Day event in Paris when at the closing Mass Pope John Paul II indicated his intention to declare St. Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church. The common wisdom was to reserve this title for prolific theologians who had authored many lofty treatises. So why was St. Therese being honored? St. Therese had once written in her “Little Way”:

Sometimes, when I read spiritual treatises ... my poor little mind soon grows weary, I close the learned book, which leaves my head splitting and my heart parched, and I take the Holy Scriptures. Then all seems luminous, a single word opens up infinite horizons to my soul... I see that it is enough to realize one's nothingness, and give oneself wholly, like a child, into the arms of the good God.¹

¹ *Lives of the Saints*, edited by Fr. Joseph Vann, O.F.M. (N.Y.: John J. Crawley and Co., Inc., 1954), p. 456-457.

Unlike most of the other Doctors of the Church, St. Therese published very little. Her autobiography is the main source of our knowledge of her teaching. She lived just twenty-four years and wrote her *Story of a Soul* under obedience to her Carmelite superiors. But because of her great sanctity, she was able to grasp spiritual truths in a manner not possible even to great intellectuals- some knowledge is far beyond books.

She died at age 24, making her the youngest doctor of the Church. Though youthful, "...her ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity, and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters."² The most prominent contribution that she is credited with giving the Church is her clear and deep understanding of spiritual childhood.

She was guileless. To be without guile means to be without any deceitful cunning of any kind, truly innocent. We need to recover this sense of spiritual childhood in a day and age that has lost its respect for innocence. It is a word that has taken on a negative connotation, when in fact innocence is a beautiful gift.

Young children often grasp profound spiritual truths far better than we do, because we might be tempted to let cynicism creep into our vision. We should agree with the philosopher Pascal when he commented: "The supreme act of reason lies in recognizing that there is an infinity of things that surpass it."³ We must guard against being trapped by an understanding of reason that cuts itself off from any revelation from above. Our minds are not the be-all and end-all of the world.

² Pope John Paul II, Proclamation of St. Therese as Doctor of the Church, 19 October 1997.

³ Blaise Pascal, "Pensées," 267 Br.

The secret of her great success is summed up in one sentence she spoke shortly before her death: “I have never given God anything but love, and it is with love that He will repay.”⁴ This “little way” is a path of complete abandonment to God, and is not meant to be an “easy” way, as if it were less demanding. When we completely trust in divine mercy and abandon ourselves to it, our relationship with Christ becomes everything to us, and nothing can even come close.

When God rewards the little ones, he means all those who remain faithful to their daily duties in simplicity of heart, and love God for Himself, and never take themselves so seriously as to think that we know better than God. Yes, children, you all have much to teach your parents, your priests and all of us. The desire Thérèse expressed to “spend her heaven doing good on earth,”⁵ continues to be fulfilled in marvelous ways today through her example and the important lessons of Scripture.

The Scriptures remind us of the necessity of being like newborn infants, longing for pure spiritual milk. The early saints rightly cautioned against those false teachers who mix chalk with milk.⁶ Let us steer clear and remain rooted in the essentials of the faith, clear enough for all to recognize that we may taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

⁴ By Love Alone: Daily Readings with St. Therese of Lisieux (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986)

⁵ (*Opere Complete*, p. 1050)

⁶ St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies 3.17.4). “...they destroy those persons who, by reason of the resemblance of the words, imbibe a poison which disagrees with their constitution, just as if one, giving lime mixed with water for milk, should mislead by the similitude of the color;”