

## *Like a Child*

On October 2-3, I celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation in Cheyenne at the Cathedral on Saturday and Holy Trinity parish on Sunday. The homily is below.

***“Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it”*** (Mk. 10:15). This is one of the best signs that you are ready to be confirmed – that you accept the kingdom of God like a child. Do you know what it means to accept the kingdom like a child?

The best way to understand what Jesus meant is to look at a person who lived like a child before God. St. Thérèse of Lisieux was like that. She was a normal kid. As a little girl she was affectionate and she loved to laugh. She was also strong willed. Her mother described her as “incredibly stubborn,” and when things didn’t go her way, she threw a huge tantrum.

Later she became a Carmelite nun, and her flaws stayed with her. Thérèse was aware of her littleness or her faults, and she wrote, “It is impossible for me to grow up, so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way.” By a “little way” she meant a humble way, one suited to a weak person with many imperfections.

Thérèse thought of an elevator in the home of a rich person. She wrote: “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 in the Scriptures for some sign of this elevator.” Then she read this verse, ***“Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”*** (Mk. 10:14). Thérèse said, “The elevator which must raise me to heaven is your arms, O Jesus, and for this I have no need to grow up, but rather I have to remain little and become this more and more.”

For Thérèse, being a little child before God included two things. First, she humbly accepted his love, like a child accepts love from her parents. She looked at Jesus to lift her up in his arms. She trusted that he loved her in her weakness. St. Thérèse often fell asleep while praying with the other sisters in the chapel, but she thought, “Parents love their children just as much asleep or awake.” So she believed that God loved her even when she slept during prayer time. She humbly received God’s love like a child.

Second, she learned to love others with God’s patient love. When she was reading St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, she came to the verse that described love as the greatest spiritual gift. She said, “O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is to love.”

Slowly she learned to do little acts of kindness. When someone mistreated her, she controlled her temper and kept quiet. She decided to help an elderly nun who kept complaining that she didn’t do things right, but she would smile back at her. As a religious sister, Thérèse felt incapable of even little acts of charity, or the smallest expression of concern and patience and understanding. Yet she had hope that Christ would act through her. She learned to do little things for others, like a child who helps in small ways.

To accept the kingdom of God like a child is to humbly accept God’s love, and then to imitate that love. We can only do that if we see God as a loving Father. That is how Jesus told us to pray. When he taught the disciples to pray the Our Father, he said, ***“Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you... If you who are wicked know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”*** (Lk. 11:9,13). Jesus described God the Father as a generous gift giver. He urged us to ask for his gifts, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Parents, despite their sins, are so good to their children. Yet, God’s goodness far surpasses them. Our Father in heaven will give us the Holy Spirit whenever we ask. As you are confirmed, be a little child

before your gracious Father, even though you know that you have been a brat. At times, you are selfish, and you struggle to do small acts of kindness, like Thérèse.

That is one of the things that has made prayer effective for me. When I pray at the end of the day, I often remember how I spoke too quickly or judged people. In general, I realize my failure to be the disciple the Lord expects of me. Before that used to block my prayer. I was stuck on thinking about my sins, and I didn't open myself to God's mercy. My focus was on my failures. That is bad prayer. Now, I just pray as a humble child trusting in his mercy.

Today, when you are confirmed be a little child before your gracious father. He wants to fill you with his Holy Spirit so that you feel safe, and so that you know God is beside you.

One of the students wrote in her letter, *"I want to be confirmed so that I can have a better connection with God. I also want to be confirmed so I can have a better understanding of him. I also want to be confirmed because then I will be closer to God."* Most students write about their desire to be closer to God. Remember that God wants to be close to you more than you want to be close to God. That is why he gives us his Spirit.

You can see how this happened with the saints. They felt so close to God. One student chose St. Maria Goretti. She was able to forgive her killer because she had a close relationship with God. The student who chose her wrote: *"I chose St. Maria Goretti because she is a good example of forgiveness; Maria could have not forgiven the man who stabbed her, but God always said to forgive and that is what she did. Before death Maria forgave Alessandro; later Alessandro was in prison and Maria came to his dream to forgive him and give him Lilly flowers."*

St. Maria Goretti was not quite 12 years old when she was stabbed to death. But she had a strong prayer life. It gave her the grace to forgive the man who stabbed her when she refused his sexual advances. Her last words were, "I forgive Alessandro Serenelli, and I want him with me in heaven forever."

You have been inspired by the saints. Remember that they were transformed like Christ day by day. Be patient with yourself like Thérèse. Pray every day and spend time reading the Bible. Come to Mass, not so much to fulfill an obligation, but to be filled with the power of Christ in the Eucharist. Work every day at being more selfless and other-centered.

***"Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."*** Today be like a child before God, ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Expect God to pour the Spirit into your heart. The main way to pray is simply to ask God with faith and be receptive.

Then ask for the grace to be more and more selfless. To imitate his love like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Bologna, St. Thomas Aquinas, or St. Kateri Tekakwitha. Ask God to free you from sin and selfishness and instead to serve others. Ask God to fill you with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, chastity, humility, and perseverance.

Accept the kingdom of God like a child.