



Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI IESUM

Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

The Littlest Apostles

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their Angels in Heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father ... it is not the will of your Heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.” (St. Matthew 18:9-14)



Jesus and the children!

So often, implicitly or explicitly, Jesus invokes children as exemplars in God's Kingdom. So much so, in fact, that He *admonishes* us against despising any of them in their littleness.

It is likely that you have heard many sermons and read many reflections, on the Scriptural verse that “**unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom**” (St. Matthew 18.3) — that Christ is not asking us to simply “go out and play,” or to speak as children speak.

We have listened and we have yawned. “Of course,”

We know the unfeigned love and simple trust of children. It touches us (or ought to touch us) deeply. We are indicted by it in our “adult” love that is largely mathematical in nature and a matter of *quid pro quo*, a giving and an expected receiving, a balance between self-giving, that is more often a fulcrum leveraging our own advantage. A child most often gives without counting, loves as a matter of spontaneity, and not measure. Children are terrible at math. Thank God. They know nothing of fulcrums and levers and the like, of using their love to ends other than love.

We do. We adults. And the children shame us, remind us of something clear, untainted, uncalculated, that we instinctively recognize as something we have lost, and we lament it ... even as we esteem ourselves too wise to return to that innocence.

We are motivated by a child's loving trust. It moves us to be better than we are, to go beyond our narrow interests — to *enact* the fulfillment of that trust, of what is anticipated of us by the child — to something noble and good within us.

That is why we are not to despise them. They call us, in their littleness, in their uncalculated love, in the simplicity of their trust, *to become the image of God*. Of goodness. Of responsiveness to love and trust.

That is also why they are our exemplars. *They are the unwitting Apostles*. They proclaim an invincible, an incredibly powerful evangel that only God can proclaim through them and it is His: *love, trust, God*. Be good. Do not deceive. Throw away your calculator. Expect what you ask for in love. Accept what is denied you in love.

Earth, this world of politics and primacy and power — this is *our* world ... the world of adults. And we've made quite a mess of it. I cannot think of one child

who has screwed up the world, and not made it more beautiful for his or her presence.

Unfortunately, by our example they become like us — when Jesus tells us that by *their* example, we should become like *them*!

After all, their very Angels behold the Face of His Father in Heaven. Yours ... well, ours ... may well be hiding in shame, not because they have failed Him, but because we have failed *them*.

The Angels? *No, no! The children!*

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