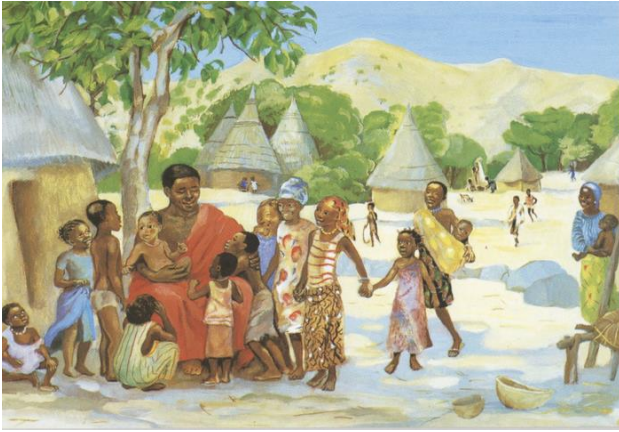




ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THIS SUNDAY September 23 & BEYOND”

“Don’t Offend”



The gospel story that we have for Sunday includes a very famous scene where the Disciples of Jesus have tried to keep some children, presumably with their parents, from coming near Jesus.

Earlier in the gospel story for Sunday we heard how disciples were trying to push their way into the seats that would be closest to Jesus when he finally comes into his glory in the last days. It's an obvious contrast.

Jesus rebukes his disciples for thinking like that, and then because he says to the disciples in the very very familiar language suffer not the little children to come unto me, he points to the opposite looking for power and Glory, pointing to the children.

This past week in a discussion group I shared with some clergy colleagues that I had hope for the disciples at this point in the gospel story. When it seemed like they were getting everything wrong about Jesus, including Peter trying to keep Jesus from going onto his crucifixion, which was necessary for his mission. At least the disciples at this point had accepted that Jesus was the Messiah for sure that he would be coming into his kingdom and glory (and from their perspective it appeared they were all going to be going with him!) So to me it seems like progress in that the disciples were coming along. But even in their progress they're just too consumed with themselves.

Rather than not wanting to keep children away from himself, he wanted to bless them. It is also clear he was pointing to the children and saying to his disciples, “I need you to be more like this.” And I think there are two things here that he meant in that regard. The most obvious one is to have a childlike faith like children. But the other consideration is that he knew that the disciples would be the ones carrying on the Christian faith when he ascended, so he needed to remind them to get their priorities straight and make sure that they are going to do the same thing that he came to do, with children and with adults and anybody. This is kind of giving it

away if you're following each Sunday, but in chapter 10 just one chapter later, Jesus will finally say to them, “for even the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Yes. Jesus had a very sensitive spot in his heart for children. It shows up in this story when he wanted to bless the children, and it shows in some of his other teaching. For instance, Jesus said if someone does anything to harm one of these little ones it will be like millstones put around his neck in judgement and he will sink deep into the depths of hell. I think it's a pretty simple contrast for The Gospel story this Sunday, and so I want to keep that simplicity in this Reflection.

But I would like to add one application about children in the church. This is not about all the horror stories of the church and offenders that have been released into the public recently, nor is it about the obvious that no church is innocent of the same kinds of problems and offenses. The good news there is that the Church, every single one of them, is and has been working hard on trying to make sure that those in positions of leadership are carefully vetted and then trained, along with lay members of congregations for the same vetting and training.

The application I want to make is about the priority of children in the church as far as their very presence is concerned. Churches tend to go one of two ways regarding children. They either sideline them for a variety of reasons, such as for making noise in church, not being able to understand teachings, uncontrollable sometimes, shorter attention spans in church, etc., and so they are removed from church in some way or the other in order to not be a disturbance during services. The other end of the spectrum is that church services get reduced down to the age level and attention spans of children as if no one else is there in church. And so the adults are bereft themselves of solid, thorough profound deep teaching and miss those quiet and silent spots in church where reflection can take place. Of course the kids don't know the intricacies in the nuances of those arguments. So that's not their fault.

One way or the other it is the actions and behaviors of a congregation towards children that can be very frustrating when a congregation says very clearly we want and we need children in our worship and in our congregation as a whole. And then, when the kids are there in church and making noise people start to complain because there are children who are there in church. You see the Dilemma. It's almost like the kind of contrast that we hear in the gospel story today in a different perspective.

I think our congregation of All Saints' has done pretty well in having a church that understands that kids will be kids and adults need to be adults. And if you can work that into a compromise, if you will, of awareness and attitude, then you will build the kind of environment that Jesus was talking about where the kids are not

offended, neither are the adults and we all have access to Jesus so he might bless us all.

Fr. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector

Readings for this Sunday – The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Wisdom 1:16-2:1, 6-22 Psalm 54 James 3:16-4:6 Mark 9:30-37

CALENDAR

SUNDAY: The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

8:00a Low Mass (Church)

10:30a Solemn High Mass (Church)

—*The entrance to the church is on 6th Avenue*—

Note: Coffee Hour & Fellowship follow the Mass in the Parish Hall.

MONDAY: 7:00p (AA) Doctors' Group (Fireside Room)

TUESDAY: Noon Mass (St. Mary's Chapel)

FRIDAY: AA Meetings

8:00p Ladies' Group (Fireside Room)

8:15p Men's Group (Parish Hall)