

*Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children,  
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

*Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child  
is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 18:3-4



## **INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY**

**OPENING SONG:** The Lord hears the cry of the poor (or your choice)

**INTRODUCTION:**

The United Nation (UN) Universal Children's Day, which was established in 1954, is celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> June each year to promote international togetherness and awareness among children worldwide.

**The teachings of the church** attach great importance to the child and his/her basic rights. **Paragraph 244 of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church** calls for the protection of the dignity of the child:

*In the Family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. This is true for every child, but it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more they are in need of everything, when they are sick, suffering or handicapped.*

The Catholic Church also stipulates that: *The rights of children must be legally protected within juridical systems. In the first place, it is necessary that the social value of childhood be publicly recognised in all countries. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations.*

**According to Pope Francis, children are the greatest blessing God has bestowed upon men and women.**



*Yet many children are rejected, abandoned, robbed of their childhood and of their future... it is shameful when people say it is a mistake to bring a child into the world. Please, let's not unload our faults on children. Children are never a mistake.*

*The hunger, poverty, fragility and ignorance of some children are not mistakes but only reasons for us to love them even more, with more generosity.*

Pope Francis wondered aloud about the value of international declarations of human and children's rights if children are then punished for the mistakes of adults. *All adults are responsible for children and for doing what we can to change this situation. Every marginalized and abandoned child, who lives by begging on the street for every little thing, without schooling or health care, is a cry to God. Their suffering is the result of social system, created by adults.*

*Children who are victims of such poverty often become prey to criminals who exploit them for immoral trade and commerce or train them for war and violence.*

*Even in rich countries, many children live dramas that scar their lives heavily because of family crises or inhuman living conditions. They suffer the consequences of a culture of exaggerated individual rights and become precocious. And often, they absorb the violence they are exposed to, unable to dispose of it, and are forced to become accustomed to degradation.*

*In every case, these are childhoods violated in body and soul.*

***But none of these children is forgotten by the father of heaven. None of their tears is lost.***

*(Adapted from General Audience 8 April 2015)*

**SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 18:1-4**

**REFLECTION:**

When the disciples came to Jesus to ask who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, they were expressing the values of their culture. Being honoured by others was more important even than life itself. Perhaps the disciples were hoping that Jesus might identify them as the greatest in the kingdom, given how much they had sacrificed to follow him.

How surprising Jesus' answer must have been to the disciples. He didn't identify the most exalted person in the kingdom. Instead, he called them to childlikeness and humility. We enter the kingdom through childlike dependence upon God's grace. We live fruitfully in the kingdom by daily offering ourselves to God in humble submission.

Disciples of Jesus today are not unlike the first who followed him. We also are impressed by greatness, both in the world and in the church. Which of us wouldn't like to meet a famous Christian leader or Marist and, if we're honest, which of us wouldn't like to be thought of as great? So the call of Jesus to childlikeness continues to challenge his disciples to a new way of thinking and living.



**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION and SHARING**

1. Do you ever get caught up in the race for greatness? When? Why?
2. How do you feel about being like a child in God's kingdom?
3. What helps you to depend upon God fully?
4. What helps you to be truly humble before God and people?
5. What helps you to live in a hidden and unknown way like Mary?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**



**O Lord, in this story I can so easily see myself.  
Like the disciples, I can get caught up in worldly values.  
I too can seek my own greatness,  
either in my accomplishments or  
in being with people whom others consider great.**

**So I must confess that I hear the call to childlikeness  
at first as a word of rebuke.**

**If I am to receive this as a word of grace,  
I need the freedom that comes with a kingdom-based values readjustment.**

**As I come before you, Lord, may I come as a child: unpretentious, simple, dependent.  
And as I live my life in the world, may I express genuine humility as I offer myself to you fully,  
and as I give myself to others in servanthood. Amen.**