



The Parish of Saints Anthony & Aloysius

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Homily at Mass 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B – 23 September 2018

Our Year 6 students perhaps felt somewhat gawky and awkward as they presented at St Anthony's School concert last Wednesday. But perhaps it was our younger children – our Preps and those in Years 1 and 2 who showed the greatest sense of fun, doing their best to sing and dance and entertain mum and dad, their grandparents and others in the audience at St Anthony's Hall. How did the little child whom Jesus took in his arms today feel as Jesus used him as an example to follow? Because of who Jesus is, little children must have felt comfortable, at ease, free in his company, in his strong yet gentle arms. Little children – as we all know – are children uncomplicated, transparent, open and unaware in a way that we adults often are not. Pope Pius X, the only Pope who has ever been a parish priest, was on the money when he proposed that children as young as 6 or 7 should be able to receive Holy Communion. I don't know that there is any other time in our lives when we are closer to God than at that age: it's perhaps for this reason that our First Holy Communion Day remains a vivid memory for all of us. Many Priests say that they first sensed a call to the priesthood at First Holy Communion time. St Therese of Lisieux always remembered kneeling down after her First Holy Communion and asking God with all her heart: "Lord show me what you want me to do".

The presence of the small child in Jesus' arms contrasts so much with our Lord's stern prediction of his suffering and death, and the childish behaviour of the apostles as they argued with one another over which one our Lord's special favourite, who was the better was among them, who was first in the pecking order.

This must have been one of those moments when Jesus must have shaken his head, breathed a deep motley sigh, perhaps wondered if this motley group of 12 would ever be all that he hoped for them – brave and courageous apostles, foundations of his Church.

Commentators and preachers often draw a contrast between what it is to be 'childish' and what it is to be 'child like'. This may be a point we can draw from today's Gospel story, as well as the teaching of St James. Children will have their squabbles but it's probably us adults who are experts at childishness – pettiness, jealousy and ambition, wars and battles, bottled up resentments and hurts. Parents have a big task in raising and forming their children. "Christianity doesn't come naturally" a young dad told me once. My youngest nephew is a real boy – he loves sport and trucks, and he can be a bit rough. His parents teach him constantly and repeatedly to say sorry, to be gentle – many lessons, day after day, as he grows up.

At the baptism of their children, parents are reminded that they are the first teachers of their children in all things, especially the things of faith. It's at home as we grow, that we learn how to pray, how to be generous and thoughtful, how to judge our behaviour. Our children

are like sponges – they soak in everything from the example of mum and dad and the family life that surrounds them. Here at Mass – despite the struggle sometimes – our children see that mum and dad value the life of the Church and the priority of Sunday Mass.

As disciples of Jesus, we never cease to be 'childlike' – learners, listeners, followers, as we walk in the footsteps of Christ our Master and Teacher. What other words come to mind when we think about 'childlike': open, wide-eyed, trusting, forgiving, loving, affectionate, warm, friendly. Can you think of any others?