

In today's gospel Jesus says "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these....whomever does not accept the kingdom of God like child will not enter it".

I invite you today to imagine yourselves in this scene. Consider yourself as a child in Jesus's presence.

You might think about the qualities of a child: eager, curious, playful, clever, creative, mischievous, anxious, unsure.

Don't forget also that in Jesus' time children were oftentimes thought of as a burden, were exploited and were merely thought of a smaller or "less than" version of an adult.

But I invite you to consider the trusting nature of a child; trusting in the loving wisdom of a parent, guardian or trusted adult. Imagine hearing and learning about the Kingdom of God from a child's perspective. "Children are like sponges" it's often said, accepting wisdom without doubt, debate and discourse. A child trusts and believes, and then goes on to wonder like a little scientist.

My mother used to say to me as a child, "to thy own self be true", which of course I will never forget. I think this statement still informs my idea of truthfulness.

So we rest in the fact that God, like a loving parent, gives us this vision of the Kingdom of God, and the invitation is to soak it up into our hearts. And as Christians we are charged with knowing this and living it out in our lives. We are invited to dwell in and contemplate in this promise: "the Kingdom of God". Jesus uses so many analogies to describe the Kingdom of God maybe for a reason, for us to fill in the blanks, to use our imagination to allow us to be the architects and engineers. How do you imagine the Kingdom of God?

Christ of course is the King of this Kingdom and we'll celebrate this feast day next month. In this Kingdom there is healing, justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit! And when we dwell in this Kingdom, we see "all things new in Christ and through Christ" (which of course is the theme of this Ignatian Year).

To see all things new in Christ is to see all the good going on in our midst. My friend's daughter who is 14, a freshmen in high school and a dancer, announced to her mother a few months ago that she wanted to be a surgeon. But then recently changed her mind, saying that it's too gross.

I marvel and feel grateful that this 14 year old girl can aspire to be a surgeon when merely 50 years ago this might not have been a possibility for her.

Today, we mark the closing of the Season of Creation, which reminds me of another girl whom I met in Haiti when I was volunteering. Thin and malnourished she grew spinach, but rather than consuming the nutrient rich green, she would sell it to make money. Likely to support her own children. According to the UN, "about two-thirds of the female labour force in developing countries, and more than 90 percent in many African countries, are engaged in agricultural work." It's not an exaggeration to say that the climate crisis as well as the pandemic are disproportionately affecting the excluded and disenfranchised. I wonder where is she now?

These disparities rightfully cause a tug in my soul, but I find the antidote is to return to dwelling in the Kingdom of God, where we can "see all things new in Christ". Witnessing and marveling at all of God's work going on in our midst, but also working hard to welcome those who are thought of as "less than",

just as Jesus does in the gospel today by welcoming, embracing and blessing children. Imagine Jesus again: “then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them” Who are today’s “children” in this scene that you encounter?

Luckily, we endeavor on these efforts together in solidarity as a Christian community as the first reading suggests, we need each other and need to cling to one another to accomplish our goals. With feet firmly planted in the present, we dream together of a joyful future. And, we rest trusting in God’s promise of leading us by the hand to his Kingdom.

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