

Father Dave's Homily

09/23/12 25 B

-- Here in America, we look at infants and small children as cute and cuddly. We pay a lot of attention to them. We also spend a lot of money on them. So it's hard for us to imagine a society where children were on the bottom rung of the ladder.

-- Yet, in Jesus' day, that's exactly where small children stood. Of course, parents back then loved their children. After all, those who survived would provide for them in their old age.

-- But children were very vulnerable. A high percentage died in the first year of life. A higher percentage, even a majority, did not make it to their 18th birthday. (e.g., the story of the 12 year old daughter of Jairus dying was all too common). Their health was not a great priority.

-- In a real sense, children were "non-persons." And we need to keep that in mind when Jesus takes the child in his arms in today's gospel. Children were valued principally for the future contribution they would make to the family, not for themselves.

-- Jesus just said *If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.* He's invited his followers to welcome the most insignificant people into their lives, to give time and attention to those whom most people neglect, or at least pay little attention to.

-- One noted theologian recently recalled when he was giving marriage preparation days for couples. He used to tell them (especially the women) to notice how their future spouse treated the insignificant people: waitresses, doormen at hotels, janitors, etc. That would be an indication of how he would treat them within a few years.

-- And he also tells of being at a seminary where he suggested that those faculty voting on whether to admit a seminarian to orders should ask the maintenance man there what he thought. They could learn a lot about the seminarians from him—and about the faculty as well.

-- We live in an era in which we follow the rich and famous, and so many people desire to be like them. We admire success, and we keep score of who is on top, in sports, fashion, entertainment, politics, etc.

-- But, as Jesus reminds us, the true test of character is not how we strive for and achieve success. The real question is not how far up the ladder we get, in whatever occupation or lifestyle (even religiously speaking).

-- The real test of character is whether we are willing to pay attention to the most insignificant people around us. Do we give them the attention we would give to someone who could do favors for us? Are we willing to give them the time of day? Are we even willing to become “one of them”?

-- Our willingness to do this has little to do with our income level or level of education. It depends upon our willingness to become small before others in order to care for those who are most insignificant.

-- In his own lifetime, Jesus did not achieve a lot of fame. Most secular histories of that century didn’t give him a mention. The Roman emperor probably didn’t even know that Pilate had him crucified.

-- His power came from the witness of his life lived for the least of his brothers and sisters. It took a while for his own disciples to realize this. So we should not be surprised that it takes us a while as well.

-- Jesus taught his disciples that greatness in God’s eyes came from being willing to associate with the lowly—indeed, to become one with them. May that lesson not be lost on us, especially when we encounter the most insignificant people of our own society.