

## SFX 14A 2023

The first reading we have heard today, from the prophet Zechariah is about 2,300 years old, it is the word of God coming down to us over the centuries. It foretells the kind of person the Saviour would be, the attitude he would have, the work he would do. *"See now, your King comes to you; he is victorious, he is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey."* It was a prophecy fulfilled on Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem as a King with a humble heart, a man of peace. The man who wanted war rode on a horse; the man who intended peace rode on a donkey. It points to the Gospel today about the character of Jesus, the Lord who is *"gentle and humble of heart."*

Who amongst us does not at times feel overburdened, weighed down by the cares of life. How many today suffer from stress, anxiety and depression, and how good it is to know that we have a gentle and humble Lord in whom we find rest. *"The Lord raises all who are bowed down"* as the Psalm puts it.

Many of you are parents and grandparents, and we know that children today can have their own problems and difficulties. But it is lovely to see their natural innocence, that child-like trust and sense of wonder. Children live in the moment and find joy in the simplest things. We adults have often become too cynical and sceptical, too world-weary and disillusioned. We have seen it all, been round the block. We can be weighed down by responsibilities and expectations, disappointment and loss.

Twice in the Gospel Jesus Lord points to children to teach us something. The overly clever and sophisticated have lost something of the child. Perhaps we have become too correct, too clever, too self-important. Jesus sets a child in the midst of the disciples and says: unless you change and become like a little child, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean to become like a little child?

Well first can we recover something of their TRUST. While of course children must be kept from danger, they trust their parents and rely on them for their needs, their protection, and their guidance. In our faith journey, Jesus invites us to place our trust in a loving Father.

Secondly, perhaps we can recover something of their INNOCENCE. Not naivety or ignorance, but a purity of heart and a freedom from the burdens of past hurts and resentments. Can we brush off the scrapes of life and let go of grudges, judgment, and prejudice, and to approach others with an open and non-judgmental spirit. As we grow older we put on hardened shells as a form of self-defence when we get hurt. Can we recover the innocence of the child and create space within ourselves for love, forgiveness, and reconciliation?

Thirdly, perhaps we can recover their SENSE OF WONDER. Their minds want to explore the world, they find joy in the simplest of things—a butterfly, a rainbow, a gentle breeze. Jesus calls us to rekindle this sense of wonder, recognizing the divine presence in the everyday experiences of life. Cultivate a reverence for creation.

And how sad it is, as often happens, that the cares and responsibilities of life make our spirits grow tired. We become weary and overburdened. How we fail ourselves, how we fail each other, and how we fail our world when we fail to wonder.

To become like a child is not to regress in maturity or understanding, but rather to cultivate a humble and receptive spirit.

---

On Tuesday we will celebrate the feast of St Benedict, and for him humility was the key to spiritual progress. He dwelt on aspects of humility that are the first steps of love. There can be distorted forms of humility – think of Uriah Heep – but for Benedict it was more about the truth of ourselves before God and before others.

**But Humility is not something we set out to achieve by human effort.** It is not something that we strive to possess. When it is pursued that way it can become deformed. It is more like a state: a state of grace. It is more like self-forgetfulness. It is the ground for everything else to flourish. For John Chrysostom **“Humility is the mother, the root, the nurse, and the foundation of all the other virtues, and it is what holds them together.”**

If there is a saint who demonstrates this quality, it is St Thérèse de Lisieux. She summed it up beautifully. “If a little flower could speak, it seems to me that it would tell us quite simply all that God has done for it, without hiding any of its gifts. It would not, under the pretext of humility, say that it was not pretty, or that it had not a sweet scent, that the sun had withered its petals, or the storm bruised its stem, if it knew that such were not the case.” Humility is not doing ourselves down, it has something of the qualities of the child, living with an open and receptive heart. It is not thinking less of ourselves, but not thinking about ourselves at all. Its fruit is naturalness.

May the childlike qualities of trust, innocence and wonder guide us on the path of eternal life. May the humility and gentleness we see in Jesus be ours. As we have prayed in this church during June, the month of the Sacred Heart: Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.