

The Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 22, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #32)

“Childhood is fully vulnerable because the child is powerless, while those who care for him enjoy an all-powerful freedom. Instead of leading him rightly they can lead him astray in a variety of egotistical ways, oftentimes in a manner which is quite unconscious of its moral indifference.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, Unless You Become Like This Child, pp. 12-13)

In the beautiful Prologue to his gospel, Saint John writes: *“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”* (John 1:14). This reflection expressed by Saint John highlights the start of the new Covenant relationship our Father has instituted with His children. Unlike the old covenant made with the man, Adam, the new covenant will be made with the God-man, Jesus. The new may appear a contradiction to the old. In the old, man was formed as is. He is grown. He possesses all that he needs to live this covenant relationship. The new, the Word becomes flesh by being born as one like us. He will live all aspects of the lives of men. He will begin as a helpless infant. He will choose to allow Himself to be nurtured by His creation through Mary, His Mother and Joseph, His foster father. He will submit to being taught about Himself by His creatures. Let us consider again that line. As a child, God in His Word Jesus, consents to being educated about God (Himself) by His creatures. The humility and tenderness God shows to His children by becoming one of them is profoundly moving. For our reflection this week, let us ask ourselves this question: “Why? Why did God choose to become a child, instead of coming to us as an adult?”

For many generations, societies have formed into cultures where children were not seen as being fully part of the society. Greek and Roman culture developed with the idea that the child is only a stage in the development of a fully human person. Because the child was “not yet” a person, few religious and political leaders concerned themselves with the experiences of children. Only much later in mankind’s shared history, did we begin to realize the importance of childhood and how the child’s psychological development affects the person growing into adulthood. Even now as I type these words, child psychology experts are discussing how the continued policy of “mask wearing” will affect our children as they grow into adulthood. Let us pray that the decisions our leaders make today trying to best protect our children will not pose greater threats in the future.

By choosing to dwell with His children as a child, our God affirms both the spiritual and personal dignity of all children. The innocence our blessed Lord displays as an adult was first nurtured in His childhood by His parents. The family home can now be understood as a church blessed by God Himself who chose to live as a child. We give neither God honor or glory if we fail in our duty to nurture the lives of these little ones. More often than naught, we show our disdain toward God by our neglect and abuse of these most defenseless in our care.

If I may propose a thought for your reflection today, are we surprised by the behavior of our fellow man? For as advanced as our society has become, are we no different from the ancient societies of the Greeks and Romans? Here is my thought, and please, I present this not as a debate point or an argument needing to be won. If I may confess, I have found that social media has become a great pulpit where fools are freely allowed to display their foolishness for the world to read. Honestly, who but a fool would think a few sentences typed upon a Twitter or Facebook account to be so profound as to

immediately convince everyone who reads that theirs is the one truly original intellectual thought. I type this knowing full well, I once behaved in the way I now speak against. Needless to say, the thought I offer is this: “Could our discredit of the importance of childhood, which would ultimately lead to some in society not viewing children, especially those yet to be born, as not possessing any capacity for dignity, value, or worth; could this rational have been strengthened when we began to accept the non-medical use of ‘artificial means’ to prevent the conception of children?” Again, could the acceptance of non-medical artificial birth control means have solidified the notion that children were some form of burden or prevention from our achieving the fullness of a life lived? Please, take this week to reflect upon your thoughts concerning this topic. It is a rather sticky subject. However, it is subject that we, as Catholics, must honestly explore in light of Jesus becoming a child.