

## **FROM THE DESK OF FATHER MURASSO**

### **Become Like The Child**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" So Jesus called a little child to him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like this child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8.33).

For the past several weeks we have been listening to this same theme in the gospel. It is important that we take to heart this serious instruction. What did Jesus mean when he told his disciples that they had to become *like* a child? As I pondered the above passage, for years I felt myself reacting to its message. Why do I have to become like a child, when it has taken so long to become an adult and to achieve my goals. I often wondered if Jesus was really serious.

In both Mark and Luke, the authors indicate that the disciples were actually arguing about who among them was the most favored by Jesus. They were in competition with one another for a prestigious position in what they thought was to be Jesus' earthly kingdom. Instead of scolding them for their apparent short-sightedness, Jesus brings a child in their midst. Jesus then tells his disciples not to become childish, but to become child-like. Herein lies the key to Jesus' powerful message.

To become *like* a child or child-like means that one takes on the characteristics of a child without necessarily undergoing a regression and acting immature or infantile. Childhood is a beautiful stage in human life. A time far too brief. It's filled with imagination and wonder and sheer fascination with the world and its opportunities. Childhood is characterized by an unconditional openness to people and new experiences.

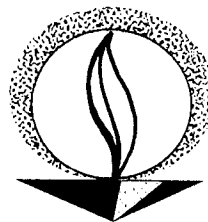
The meaning and the impact of Jesus's mandate, to *become child-like*, became very clear to me when I had the opportunity to observe a group of preschoolers at play. minutes into my observations, it was as if a bright light suddenly illuminated my intellect, I became acutely aware of what Jesus was saying. Children possess, and demonstrate definite qualities, that resemble God's kingdom. Qualities that

we as adults quickly forget or dismiss altogether as being impractical for success in our adult world.

Have you ever noticed how *free* children are? They are completely spontaneous and uninhibited. Not having *learned* to mistrust, they approach their world with genuine optimism and joy. Their spontaneity is seen in no better way than by watching them at play, where they are able to discover the world without risk. Unlike those activities that are imposed on them from without by others, play is intrinsically motivated. Through play, children can test the limits, and perhaps more importantly, practice their own future roles, and experience the roles and feelings of others in a secure and playful context.

Children love to please. They love to be accepted, not only by their peers, but especially by adults. Children will go to great lengths to behave in ways that will elicit affirmation and approval. Even during times when they find themselves at odds either with an adult or peer, they never stop trusting. They appear so willing to start over and to try again. When they perceive themselves to be hurt or mistreated whether by a peer or an adult, they are so willing to give the other a second chance. Unlike adults, children can forgive and even forget, and move on. They possess neither the need nor the desire for retaliation or retribution.

Children have the ability to love and accept others unconditionally, with no strings attached or hidden agendas. They are free of guile and duplicity. Children are also oblivious to difference. Skin color, ethnic background, economic status, or family history are never prerequisites for engaging a peer in play or choosing another for a friend. You and I have much to learn from children. They are truly a gift for so many reasons, however, one reason stands out above all others. God has gifted you and me with children so show us what we have forgotten: the way to achieve eternal life.



**Seek the  
Wisdom of  
the LORD**