

SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, A
THE LEARNED, 14TH THE WISE AND MERE CHILDREN
*“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give
you rest” (Matt. 11: 28).*

As we gradually turn the knobs of our Church doors this weekend, we find the words of our Lord in the Gospel (Matt. 11: 25-30) very consoling, encouraging and apt. “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11: 28). The opening of our Church doors is rightly a response to this gracious invitation to go in to meet our Lord in His dwelling place, in the Word and in the Eucharist. For the past months, we have been threatened with fears of the invincibility of this novel Coronavirus; we have “laboured” with various complex methods of containing this strange COVID-19 pandemic; and we have been “overburdened” with the statistics of the cruelty of this insidious virus. The very closure of the Church and denial of entry into our places of worship and solace have been more than excruciating to our soul than to our bodies. No words are more soothing and welcoming than these palpable words of our Lord: “Come to Me.”

How do we respond to this call? How should we go to Him? With what do we go? I hear the words: excitement, joy, thanksgiving, gratitude, expectancy, faithful, and trust. I hear love, confession, reconciliation, offering and gifts. I hear peace, comfort, hope, satisfaction, fulfilment and many more. Truly, all these words express our different dispositions as we enter into His court and sanctuary after nearly four months of absence. The Psalmist captures the state of our minds so succinctly: “I will give You glory, O Lord, my King, I will bless Your Name for ever. I will bless You day after day and praise Your Name for ever” (Ps. 144: 1-2). We give Him thanks and bless His Holy Name for all that He has been in our lives: for walking with us through this dark vale of tears and fears. Now the light is shining forth.

The voice of the prophet Zechariah in the First Reading (Zech. 9: 9-10), prophesying about the coming of the Messiah into the city of Jerusalem, the city of David, the city of the king, on a colt of a donkey (Palm Sunday), resonates quite appropriately with our joyful feelings, and longing for healing and peace in our world. “Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem ... He

will proclaim peace for the nations. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9: 9, 10). Our prayer as we begin to gather for communal worship will be a surge into the heavens for the grace to be disposed to receive that peace that Jesus invites us to today: “Come to Me, all you labour and are overburdened, and I will give you peace” (Matt. 11: 28).

With this sentiments of thanksgiving, we join Jesus in His prayer of thanksgiving to His Heavenly Father: “I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children” (Matt. 11: 25). But wait a minute, why would Jesus thank God for “hiding” anything from anyone? This is the first thing that struck me as I read this passage. And what are “these things” that the Father is “hiding”? Who are the “learned and the clever” here? Why is He revealing them to “mere children”? Jesus loves children or He prefers the image of “little children” (Matt. 18: 3; 19: 14). This image portrays one who is gentle, humble, dependent, innocent, ignorant and willing to learn. These are the endearing qualities of “mere children” that attracts Jesus: and He recommends them to everyone who wants to come to Him and who wants to enter into the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, “the learned and the clever” refers to the scribes and the Pharisees; the Rabbis and the Sanhedrin, who were supposedly the intelligentsia of the Jewish religious society. But who, unfortunately, thought themselves too wise and holy to recognise the Messiah, when He came. Readers of the Gospels are familiar with the constant long drawn arguments between Jesus and these men of the Torah. It was their enmity, stubbornness, disobedience, imperviousness and pride that led them to hand Him over to be crucified. Jesus was thankful to the Father because to have revealed “these things” to these recalcitrant “learned and clever” men would have been tantamount to “throwing the children’s food to the dogs” (Matt. 15: 26) or “throwing that which is holy to the pigs” (Matt. 7: 6). The “mere children” here therefore, refers to the humble, the poor, ordinary people, who believed in Jesus and accompanied Him everywhere. “These things” that were revealed to “mere children” was the mystery of Jesus’ identity. This we know from the very next verse: “Everything has been entrusted to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him” (Matt. 11: 27). This reflects the unique relationship of Jesus with the Father. He is the Eternal Son of the Father. He is

Begotten not made, One in substance with the Father. He is the Messiah. These truths are “these things” hidden from the wise and clever of this world and revealed to “mere children.”

For us to receive this revealed truth, we have to become like “mere children”: humble, innocent, malleable, dependent and receptive. We have to empty ourselves of our bloated ego in order to be filled by the humility of the Spirit and the wisdom of God. The man who thinks he knows too much cannot be taught anything. We need to become like the little children, ignorant and humble, in order to be taught by the Wisdom of God. Like dependent and insecure children who approach their parents in their needs, the Lord Jesus bids us come in our tiredness, weariness and troubles so that He may give us rest. He is ready to accompany us on our journey, sharing our yokes and burden with us. Every yoke is unique, every yoke is difficult and every burden is heavy; but all these are made easy when we come to the Lord and “cast our burdens on to Him.” He makes our yokes easy and our burdens light because “He cares for us” (1 Pet. 5: 7).