

We are All Little Children

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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Solomon, when told by God to ask for whatever he wanted, said,

“O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.”

(I Kings 3:7-9).

Solomon’s wisdom, and for that matter His empire, exceeded that of any leader before him or after him in Israel. Yet he referred to himself in this account as a little child, not knowing how to go out or come in. In fact in one sense all his wisdom can be directly associated with this one statement, as we read further that...

“The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: ‘Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you

among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (Ibid. vv. 10-14).

So what does it mean to be a little child, not knowing how to go out or come in? Every time we say the Lord’s Prayer we *imply* that we are children by referring to “Our *Father* in the heavens.” Probably, though, most of us don’t really think of ourselves as “*little* children,” but rather as responsible *adult members of His family*, created by Him. So when we add the word, little, we put ourselves in a whole different category, as the great King Solomon did.

And what do we know about *little children*? Well, for starters we know that they don’t know much. They are born ignorant and have *everything* to learn. Another thing we know is that despite their innocence they are almost entirely self-centered, and they are so far from rational or spiritual thought that the best they can do is to consider the worldly appearances of things. Of course the rate at which they *can* learn – even relatively abstract things like speech and language – is when you think about it truly astonishing, but the point is they do have to learn it; they do not know anything just by birth. So, then, to *acknowledge* this about ourselves is to accept the fact that we are all relatively ignorant, and easily misled by appearances.

This is our theme for the service today. And the question it suggests is this: how much better, how much less stressful, how much more interesting and rewarding would life be for all of us if we would just acknowledge this simple fact: *we are all little children in the Lord’s eyes?*

Life would be *better* because we would realize that we don’t have to figure everything out for ourselves. Our heavenly Father is “on the job” every moment, and besides, there are people all around us (including those who constitute our heavenly mother) who would be

happy to share their knowledge and feel fulfilled being asked to do so. Anyone who is a parent or who has worked with children knows how much fun this can be if the children are interested in learning.

Life would be *less stressful* because we wouldn't have to take ourselves as seriously as we are inclined to do, and we wouldn't take the blame or responsibility for everything that happens to us. As children we would understand that a lot of things are simply out of our control, and that we don't have the power to fix them ourselves, even if we did know how. This doesn't mean we shouldn't try, as every child tries to do what he can, but in accepting our limitations we would reduce the burden of despair over the small parts we can play while at the same time feeling motivated to learn so that we can do more when we have the opportunity. We would also realize that like children everywhere we *will* make mistakes, but that these mistakes are part of the process contributing to our growth.

Life would be more *interesting* if we acknowledged that we are children because we would understand that our job is not to know everything but to observe, learn and practice so that we can *become* useful, contributing members of society, especially in heaven. As children we could count on learning new things every day, adding to the variety of knowledge and experience that intrigues and enriches us. And of course it would be more *rewarding* because we would enjoy an ever-growing feeling of accomplishment as we grow.

In the book, *Heaven and Hell*, we read about the *innocence* of little children, and while we're explicitly taught that this is not a "genuine" internal or spiritual attribute with them, "Nevertheless *one may learn from it what (genuine) innocence is.*" So we read:

“...Little children have no internal thought, for they do not yet know what is good and what is evil, or what is true and what is false, of which such thought consists.

Consequently, they have no prudence from what is their own, no purpose or deliberation, thus no intention of an evil nature. They have no *proprium* acquired from love of self and the world. They do not attribute anything to themselves, regarding all as received from their parents. They are content with the few insignificant things presented to them, and delight in them. They have no anxiety about food and clothing, and none about the future. They do not look to the world and covet many things from it. They love their parents and nurses and their child companions with whom they play in innocence. They suffer themselves to be led, they give heed and obey. Being in this state they receive all things with their life. Therefore, without knowing why, they acquire becoming manners, learn to talk, and have the beginning of memory and thought, their state of innocence serving as a medium whereby these things are received and implanted” (*HH* 277).

As we see in the very next passage, this external state is exactly like the corresponding *internal* state when a person grows up.

“...Those who are in a state of (genuine) innocence attribute nothing of good to themselves, but regard all things as received and attribute them to the Lord. Also they wish to be led by Him and not by themselves. They love everything that is good and they delight in everything that is true, because they know and perceive that loving what is good, that is, willing and doing it, is loving the Lord, and that loving truth is loving the neighbor. They live contented with what they have, whether it be little or much, because they know that they receive just as much as is good for them – those receiving little for whom little is useful, and those receiving much for whom

much is useful. They also recognize that *they themselves do not know what is good for them*, the Lord alone knowing this, for in all things that He provides He looks to eternal ends. Neither are they anxious about the future.... With companions they never act from an evil end but from what is good, just, and sincere.... As they love nothing more than to be led by the Lord, attributing to Him all things that they receive, they are removed from what is their own (*proprium*); and to the extent that they are so removed from what is their own the Lord inflows” (HH 278).

Again, try to imagine what it would be like actually to live like this. We would not quarrel over who owns this or that (whether ideas or things), recognizing that it’s all from the Lord, given as needed. We would not insist that our way is the right way, recognizing that the Lord alone knows what’s right for anybody at any given time, and we would not fret about the future. Our motives would be simple and straightforward, guided by the Lord, and we would love nothing more than to be led by Him.

The fact that living this way would allow the Lord to fill us with practical wisdom almost goes without saying. And when we read about the wisdom of the angels, also in *Heaven and Hell*, we find that they acquire it by cultivating two specific conditions. First, we read, “...the thoughts of angels are not limited and confined by ideas from space and time, as human thoughts are, for spaces and times belong to nature, and the things that belong to nature withdraw the mind from spiritual things, and deprive intellectual sight of its range.... Neither are the thoughts of angels brought down to earthly and material things, nor interrupted by any cares about the necessities of life. Thus they are not withdrawn by such things from the delights of wisdom, as are the thoughts of men in the world” (HH 266:3). The book, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, consolidates this point

by saying, “Thought from the eyes closes the understanding, but thought from the understanding opens the eye... Consequently, if forms alone are regarded [and not uses], nothing of life, still less of love and wisdom, and thus nothing of God can be seen in nature” (*DLW* 46).

What this means is that we have to learn how to think from and appreciate spiritual things and *not* just material things. And while this is certainly not a characteristic of little children on an *intellectual* level, it certainly is on an *emotional* level, where we can plainly see them responding with affection to the love we show them – and recoiling from our anger and impatience. The lesson for us in our adult relationships is clear.

The second condition for gaining wisdom is the fact that “angels are without the love of self” (*HH* 272). This is *not* to say they are without a *sense of self*. The book on *Divine Providence* assures us that “The more closely a person is conjoined with the Lord, the more distinctly does he appear to himself to be his own person, and the more clearly does he recognize that he is the Lord’s. It seems from the appearance that the more closely one is conjoined with the Lord, the less he is his own person,” but it’s just not so (this is explained in *DP* 42). The point here is that if we want to be truly wise we need to humble ourselves as Solomon did and ask *the Lord* for “an understanding heart” – which, by the way, in Hebrew means “a listening heart.”

Now in case all this seems onerous, or nothing but work, let’s consider the outcome. When little children have the necessities for their lives – food, clothing, shelter *and affection*, they’re happy! You can see the delight in their faces, even sometimes in their whole bodies. So we read that the end result of our efforts to be like little children is a state of *uninhibited happiness!*

Translating this from an external to an internal state, when we're little we have everything to learn, but the reason we learn is so that we can interact and co-operate with others, especially our parents. When we grow up we can experience the delight of actually *being* useful to others, which as we read in several volumes of the Writings (*CL 2ff*, *TCR 731ff*, *HH*, etc.) is the real joy of heaven. Take this, for example:

“One can confirm how great the delight of heaven must be from the fact alone that it is the delight of everyone in heaven to share his delights and blessings with others; and as such is the character of all in the heavens it is clear how immeasurable is the delight of heaven. It has been shown above (n. 268), that in the heavens there is a sharing of all with each and of each with all. Such sharing goes forth from the two loves of heaven, which are, as has been said, love to the Lord and love towards the neighbor. To share their delights is the very nature of these loves. Love to the Lord is such because the Lord's love is a love of sharing everything it has with all, since it wills the happiness of all. There is a like love in every one of those who love Him, because the Lord is in them” (*HH 399*).

Interestingly this passage takes us back to the very purpose of creation, which is a heaven from the human race (*DP 27*), the heavenly state being one of eternal happiness for all who are willing to receive it, that is, who have the love and ability to serve others – as in Solomon's request.

So, finally, consider this:

“Love in itself is not to love self, but to love others and to be conjoined with them by love. An essential of love also

is to be loved by others, for thus is conjunction effected. The essence of all love consists in conjunction, it is indeed its life which is called enjoyment, delight, sweetness, blessedness, happiness and felicity. ***Love consists in this that its own is another's***; and to feel another's joy as joy in oneself, this is to love" (DLW 47).

The state of pure, innocent love is the state of a little child. This is our goal, and this is our challenge. We ***are*** little children in the Lord's eyes – which is why He can be so patient and forgiving with us. To suggest anything else in relation to His infinite wisdom would be ludicrous. The challenge is to accept and acknowledge that fact, and turn to Him as Solomon did, not asking for long life, worldly riches or the life of our enemies, but for the "listening heart" that will enable us to judge justly among our people and to "discern between good and evil."

Amen.

Lessons: *Joshua* 9: selections on the treaty with the Gibeonites
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