September 20, 25th Week in Ordinary Time

Prelude:

Greetings, and welcome to St. Louis on this 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time, and Catechetical Sunday Weekend. One key reason Catechesis, or Religious Education is so important: it can helps us recognize how God speaks to issues of today right through the readings we hear each Sunday. Listen closely to the passage from Wisdom. Standing apart from the crowd, trying to do the right thing, being alone in trying to stay on the right road: that led to bullying 2 or 3 thousand years ago, and still does. But the same God who stood by the Just One will stand by us. Does it ever seem a battle is going on inside of you? Listen to the letter from James about cultivating peace, inside and outside. And what better Gospel for Catechetical Sunday than Jesus telling his disciples, and us, to welcome children in His name. Perfect.

Homily:

If you’ve done the hard work of really examining your motives, looking deep inside, honestly recognizing the bad with the good, there is a very good chance you can identify with the disciples in the Gospel today – arguing over he goes first, who sits up front, who is the better. Needing to compare ourselves to others is just part of being human.

For some people, pride, and a competitive spirit are the life challenge. That can lead to arguing about who is greatest, just as it did for the disciples … imagine, arguing, while Jesus is trying his best to teach!

For others, their challenge may be the opposite. Some folks compare themselves to others and always feel inferior, failing to recognize just how unique and precious they are in the eyes of God.

In a brilliant move, without trying to heap guilt on his disciples, Jesus simply gives an object lesson, while affirming and blessing a little child.

There is something about little children that can put things in perspective. Adult needs to be competitive melt away. Even someone with low self-esteem can feel safe, and be led to a different place in the presence of a child. A child can reawaken an awareness of the beauty of innocence. A child can also help us see God. That’s just one reason baptisms at Mass can be such a blessing!

Now Catechetical Sunday invites us to take a different look inside.

First, it’s a time to give thanks to God for those who passed along the gift of faith to us: family members, friends, neighbors who taught by their love, by their example, by their goodness. People who taught by taking up the mantle of teacher, developing gifts God gave, and then sharing them. In our Eucharist today, please think of a couple of folks God put in your life who helped you to have faith, who in one way or another had a role to play in your being here at Mass today. Thank God, and offer a prayer for one or two of those special people.
Next, Catechetical Sunday is a time to think about what we are doing to provide the same gift to the next generation. We aren’t born with the anchor that faith provides in time of trouble, any more than we are born with the gift of language, or the ability to trust, or to build relationships, or to forgive --- these are all learned, and so is faith.

In several talks recently, Bishop Matano has been quoting statistics from a recent survey. 60% of children of catechetical age, in Catholic families, are receiving no religious education at all. He is right; we should be concerned! What resources will those children have when life gets tough? When someone they love dies? If they are bullied or persecuted?

Those who do receive religious education have the advantage to hear things like our first reading today – bullying those who are different, those not on the inside, bullying for whatever reason is an ancient problem. But God sides with the just one, was with Jeremiah when he was bullied, God vindicated Jesus, and God can strengthens us when persecution comes our way.

But without religious education, what does a kid fall back on? How do you deal with a world that often isn’t fair? Who will be with them when Mom or Dad can’t be? Jesus provides a path through every trial in our Gospel today. Be a servant, welcome the little ones, see God in them, and in reaching out, and we will receive Jesus, and the Father, and never be alone.

It isn’t just the 1st reading and Gospel that have a lot to offer us today. James provides some true wisdom as well, something definitely worth taking to heart. Think of it as him putting two roads before us.

On one road begins with jealousy and selfish ambition, something we saw hinted at in the Gospel. In no uncertain terms, James shows where that road leads: conflicts, war, and ultimately, death. Somebody gets hurt really bad.

The other road begins with seeking God’s wisdom. Faith formation helps us to find that road and begin the journey. Stay on that path, cultivate peace, and those on that path can experience days that are pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.

You may ask, what fool would choose conflicts, war and death over life? No one, if they really understood. But the entrance to the bad path is often disguised, and sometimes looking down the good path seems too hard. Until we have someone on that path, to show us just how many helps there are along the way, we can be easily tempted to the wrong path, and we can fail to discover the mistake until it is too late.

Parents, grandparents, please be sure to do what you can to help our precious little ones find and walk the path to true life. Help them discover what an anchor God can be, what a friend in time of trial.

If you can step forward to be part of our faith formation program, please do.

Of not, please, please just share freely how God and faith have been be a compass, a GPS, a way to avoid getting lost in mire, a way to a life filled with love, mercy, reassurance.
Not only are there blessings to be had on this side of life. Even more amazingly, God offers us the joy of eternity. It isn’t just an empty promise. God even offers us glimpses, moments of transcendence, when the wonder and beauty of God and eternity break into our view. There can even be precious moments when the altar is not just any old table, but the place where we are invited to dine with God. Who can ask for more?