

*Celebrating Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019...*

**Tuesday, 1 October 2019**

**Mt 18:1-4**

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In today's Gospel passage the disciples come to Jesus saying, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Bible scholars say that the original Greek puts it as "Who then is greater?" Let us reflect on this passage in the light of the extra ordinary mission month, keeping in mind the attitudes the missionaries of Jesus should possess.

To become the greatest or in simple terms to be greater than the others is a basic attitude of all of us. And that is what we tell our children and that is what we are told to become by our elders - to score better than the others in the class, to become the top in the class and the school. We honour who become the top scorers in the exams in the school and in the college. With pride, parents would say, 'My son is the rank holder. He is the class first. He is *the top most*. Recently I came to know about a child who does not like to go to his house after the results were announced. The reason - He says, "As soon as I reach home my mom would ask me how much I got in the exam. Of course, I scored 99 and am the top scorer in the class, but my mom's question would be about that one mark I lost."

The disciples cannot be blamed for the discussion they had and the thought of becoming the greatest among them. They all had reasons to be reckoned as the greatest. As one scholar puts it, "Peter was always the chief speaker, and already had the keys given him; he expects to be lord-chancellor of the household, and so to be the greatest. Judas had the bag, and therefore he expects to be lord-treasurer, which he hopes, will then denominate him the greatest. Simon and Jude are nearly related to Christ, and they hope to get place of all the great officers of state, as princes of the blood. John is the beloved disciple, the favourite of the Prince, and therefore hopes to be the greatest. Andrew was called first, and why should not he be first preferred?" All had valid reasons to be nominated to the highest position.

The answer of Jesus is clear. He clearly wants a complete change of attitude, if anyone desires to be a member of His Kingdom. "Calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Forget about the greatest position in the kingdom, the entry itself is restricted to those who are ready to become like a child. A missionary is called to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He is often accused of proselytization and conversion. In the Indian context, the term mission and missionary are synonymous with the allegations of conversion. He is often portrayed by the inimical groups as the one who is out to convert their folds by hook or by crook. But Jesus says, the missionary, the disciple of Jesus, should be the one to be converted first. The missionary should convert himself to the attitude of a child. To become the "Kid of the Kingdom" is the call for every missionary.

What does it mean to be a child in the kingdom? A child was a person of no importance in the Jewish society just as a woman in the Jewish society. He had no place in the hierarchy of authority. Unless in today's families, he was not the centre

of the family around whom everybody else in the family would revolve. In the modern families children call the shots. The whole program of the family is structured, planned and executed keeping in mind the interests of the one or two children parents have. Their likes and dislikes decide the food, mode of travel, vacation plans, and every activity of the family. That was not the case in Jewish society. He was not taken seriously, except as a responsibility of the parents to take care of. So when Jesus says that you have to change and become like a child, it implies that his disciples especially the missionary should not be concerned about social status. He should be ready to become socially insignificant. Considering the fact that by nature we all want to be recognised and respected by others, this change of attitude is hard thing for us. To become a 'nobody' in the world, a nonentity for the sake of Christ is the Christian call, a missionary call.

In every age children are the most vulnerable group in the society, next only to women. That is the case in almost all cultures. That is why we want to grow up 'fast' and be a recognised member of the society. We don't want to be children. In any calamity, be it natural or man-made, children are the ones who are hurt most. Whether it be war or poverty, who suffers more? By the family issues like divorce and parental discord who suffers the most? Who are abused and abandoned more in the modern world? It is the children. They are the most vulnerable and powerless group of the society: the voiceless lot of the society. When Jesus asks us to become like children it involves a call to become the sufferers, the vulnerable, the abandoned and the powerless of the society too. That is the call to be a disciple of Jesus. That is the call to be a missionary of the Kingdom of God. That is what Jesus became to save us.

Jesus is not saying that heaven is inhabited by the children alone. But he sure says that if we want to take a seat in the Kingdom, then we have to possess the attitudes of a child. Unless we enter into the mode of blind trust a child has in the care of his father and mother, it is difficult for any of us to see the doors of heaven. Unless we become contented like a child, with what is provided by his father or mother, we will not enjoy the happiness of the kingdom. A missionary should learn to be contented with whatever is provided to him when he dedicates himself "To be Called and Sent." Everything may not be so easy and cosy. He may not get sometimes the facilities his friends and confreres enjoy elsewhere. His prime concern will not be what he gets but what he can give. A complete 'turn' and 'become' is essential to become the disciple of Jesus in the Kingdom of God. St. Therese of Lisieux, whose feast we celebrate today and who is venerated as the patron of missionaries, shows us how this is possible in our daily life in simple yet sure ways.

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