

Gospel: Matthew 11:25-27

At that time Jesus exclaimed:

“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
for although you have hidden these things
from the wise and the learned
you have revealed them to the childlike.
Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.
All things have been handed over to me by my Father.
No one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.”

Homily Transcription: *Revealing the Face of God*

In today's gospel from Matthew Chapter 11, we listen in on Jesus's prayer to the Father. The context here is, Jesus contrasts the simplicity of God's little ones with the arrogance of the scribes and the Pharisees; the wise and the learned. Pope Francis, in his introduction to the Year of Mercy said that Jesus is the icon of God. He's the one who reveals the hidden face of the Father.

That's what Jesus speaks to in his prayer to the Father today and his address to the people. The face of God cannot be simply figured out by our logic. Faith is reasonable, but we're not going to simply reason our way to faith, nor are we going to come to understand the depths of who God is simply by an intellectual inquiry. Important as that inquiry, is important as theological investigation is, what Jesus says quite clearly here in Matthew Chapter 11, is the face of God is revealed to the childlike. It's revealed as a face of mercy and compassion.

Let's acknowledge that there are many in Jesus's time—as there are many in our time today—who purport to be acting in the name of God and who are acting exactly the opposite. I'm not just thinking of Islamic terrorists here who kill in the name of God, but also Christians who carry out terrible deeds supposedly doing it in the name of God. An act of violence, whether it is breaking into an abortion clinic and killing doctors and nurses because they're committing abortions or people who are lying to justify their own behavior, whether that's in Washington or whether that's in a church sanctuary, those people don't know the face of God.

Jesus says that it's the child-like who come to understand who truly is the face of God. What is that childlike quality? Let me just hold up two virtues in particular: humility and child-like wonder. To be a child is to recognize you're not an adult, you don't know it all; that you are a learner. That is the beginning of the path of wisdom. It is to recognize that we're always beginning again.

I just completed a week of retreat; week of solitude and silence; of rest and prayer. I did a lot of journaling in the course of the week and I was fired up with all of these insights into ways that the Lord wants to reveal himself to me. I was using the same journal that I was using on my retreat a year ago. Let me tell you, it was very humbling because as I was filled with all of these insights and I said, "Let me just go back and check and see what I was praying about last year," and there were the same things that the Lord was revealing to me a year ago that I failed to act on. It was rather humbling to have all of these insights and say, "Yeah, I've got to do this and I got to change this and change this." Then I flip back on my journal a year ago and there was the same insight a year ago saying, "You gotta do this and you gotta change that. You need more of this and less of that."

I'd forgotten that the Lord revealed those things to me a year ago and I promptly forgot them after the retreat was over. To be a religious seeker is always to begin again. The prayer that came to me was rather than being discouraged by the Lord saying to me, "Michael, let's begin again. One more time put on a humble attitude and pray for the grace to grow into the person God wants me to be; the person God wants each of us to become."

One of the characteristics that I hold up today as a child-like quality is this childlike humility. The second is an attitude of wonder. Jesus says that's the only way that we're going to come to know the Father's love.

Just a couple weeks ago, we gathered together the majority of my family and my extended cousins and a few close friends we came together at Bellarmine to celebrate this 50th year of my entering the Jesuits. As a side note, the retreat that I made in Cincinnati [last week] was at the retreat center where the journey began for me 50 years ago. It was a particular joy to be praying at that spot, remembering this young man of 18 who joined the Jesuits with such hopes and aspirations that the Lord would hopefully do great things for me; coming back to that site was a particular joy.

As I said, a couple of weeks ago we gathered together family and friends in a joyful celebration of my 50 years in the Jesuits and my sister and brother-in-law's 50 years of marriage. I was particularly struck by my little grand nieces and nephews. One of them in particular—his name is Hayden—has just this incredible curiosity about life. As he is walking along, a toad is not just a toad, it's this amazing creature; a flower is not just a flower, it's this amazing gift from God; and a tree is not just another tree and a bug is not just another bug; he couldn't walk the grounds of Bellarmine without being amazed with all of these little creatures and the beauty of God.

At one point he disappeared and his parents couldn't find him and I got a panicked text from his father and then later a questioning inquiry from his mother saying, "Where is Hayden, we can't find Hayden." Well he had wandered off with my brother down to one of the gardens of Bellarmine and there they were just looking around and he was looking at all of these different creatures and all of these different flowers and

ferns and the beauty of nature that was revealed. He was asking his big uncle, "What's this and what's this and what's this and what's this?" It is that childlike wonder that Jesus points to in today's Gospel.

The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins has written a beautiful poem and I close the reflection today which is sharing his poem that points to this sense of wonder that reveals the sense of God. He calls the poem *Pied Beauty*. Pied is an archaic word, it means unusual pairings of things.

Pied Beauty

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.