

Today's homily (Saturday, 8 October 2016) / Sajnos, nincs magyar fordítás!

(Gal 3:22-29; Lk 11:27-28) In today's first reading, St. Paul uses an analogy to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament did indeed represent a pact between God and His children, but under the Law these same children were like wards ruled over by a guardian. With the arrival of the New Testament, God's new children came of legal age thereby receiving their freedom in Jesus Christ through faith. Another analogy used by Paul features both bride and groom who symbolize Christ and His Church. It's a good analogy, so there's no reason not to build upon it. Accordingly, we might add that under the Old Testament, God and His people were like two fiancées respectively. Under the New Testament, however, God and His new people are like spouses. The transition between these two covenants is marked off by a wedding: the Incarnation, whereby our human nature was wedded to God's divine nature in Christ Jesus. Strict justice prevails during an engagement. It is a covenant of "no" – thou shall not! Any request for intimacy must meet with a rebuff. During a matrimony, however, strict mercy prevails. It is a covenant of "yes" – every legitimate request must be honored. In this case, the intimacy that prevails between God and His new people is called holiness.

This analogy explains why the New Testament in Christ's blood is more than a shortcut; it is the one and only way to holiness. Be that as it may, our Lord's gospel is so profound that even after we have heard it time and again, much of it will still remain shrouded in mystery. Each saint in turn gives us some badly needed insight into the gospel of holiness. This is particularly true of those who founded religious orders. But the insights of a few saints are so universal, so timely and so efficacious that the new way – or rather, the renewed way – which they advocate comes to be known in its own right as a shortcut to holiness. Two shortcuts that readily come to mind are the little way of St. Therese of Lisieux and the true devotion of St. Louis de Montfort. In St. Therese's day, the spiritual life of many was dominated by fear. For her part, Therese couldn't understand how anyone could fear a God who became a child. Instead of fear, her little way features confident trust in God – the trust of a smiling toddler stumbling awkwardly toward his father with open arms. The hagiography of her day emphasized what was extraordinary in the lives of the saints. Therese's little way emphasizes what is ordinary – the commonplace personalities for whom the little tasks of everyday life are accomplished – albeit, heroically.

When all is said and done, a child can do nothing extraordinary. Rather, it is the ordinary things that he does which give such joy to his parents. The child's heart is undivided. Avarice and lust do not as yet have any hold on him. The hagiography of her day also emphasized the merits of the saints whereas St. Therese's little way

underscores God's mercy. Man's merits are really God's mercies in disguise. A child can only give back to his parents what he himself has first received from them. In the hagiography of her day, the saints were supremely capable protagonists. St. Therese's little way involves acknowledging our complete helplessness before God. A child is utterly dependent upon his parents. St. Therese's little way is merely a return to our Lord's gospel teaching. When His disciples in effect asked our Lord for the secret formula to holiness, He taught them the Lord's Prayer – which is, after all, a child's prayer on the lips of adults. The key that unlocks this prayer for us is its opening salutation: Our Father. God is our Father! Along with the forgiveness of enemies, this teaching is another one of those revolutionary ideas from our Lord that – although mentioned in the Old Testament – went largely unnoticed. Elsewhere, our Lord insisted, "Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt18:3)

The deeper implications of calling God our Father were just discussed in our short expose of St. Therese's little way. But our Lord also spelled out these same implications time and again (– most recently in the gospel for holy mass this past Thursday). "What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" The little way of St. Therese simply requires us to become who we already are – God's little toddlers. This truth in turn is the missing link that unites into one system the two great shortcuts to holiness: the little way of St. Therese and the true devotion of St. Louis de Montfort. There is one person without whom the life of a child is unimaginable, namely, his mother. Not only do mother and child bond with each other spiritually and psychologically, a substantial share of a mother's biological "hardware" is dedicated exclusively to her child. Today's gospel recalls this fact. Therein, a woman called out to our Lord, saying, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed."

Our Lord's reply to this woman was nuanced. The explicit praise that He seemingly withheld on one level was, nevertheless, extended implicitly on a higher level. He said, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." In other words, "Blessed are those who are holy." Foremost among these was His own mother, Mary. Among our Lord's contemporaries, hereditary ties were greatly overestimated – understandably so, since the promise made to Abraham was based on physical descent. But being holy – that is, hearing and doing God's word – was what mattered most. Compared to this, being someone's descendant – even Abraham's – mattered little. In today's first reading, St. Paul concurred when he said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are

all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise." The key to understanding this text is yet another analogy whereby Christ and His followers are the Head and members respectively of one and the same body. We achieve this oneness with Christ through baptism. The head and members of one body must obviously have the same father and mother. Therefore, at baptism Christ's parents become ours. God becomes our Father and Mary becomes our mother. Since Mary, our mother, is Jewish, we too must be descendants of Abraham, "heirs according to the promise," as we just heard St. Paul explain.

Christ's one body is composed of Head and members. With this biblical teaching of St. Paul's as our premise, we have come to an indisputable conclusion: at our baptism, Mary becomes our mother. We in turn become her toddlers in the spiritual life. St. Augustine said as much with the aid of a rhetorical question: "Tell me how Mary became the mother of Christ, if it was not by giving birth to the members of Christ? You, to whom I am speaking, are the members of Christ." (Sermo 25, 7-8, 937-938) If St. Therese's little way simply involves us becoming who we already are: little children of our heavenly Father, then St. Louis de Montfort's true devotion demands nothing more or less from us. Here too, we must simply become who we already are – little children of our mother, Mary! Our absolute dependence on Mother Mary is a matter of faith. The devotion part comes in when we explicitly recognize this dependence through a solemn act of consecration – one that we are encouraged to renew each day. True, in addition to acknowledging Mary as our mother, the formula of consecration also recognizes her as our queen, but this addition is a mere formality for the sake of the adults among us. A toddler is still ignorant of any world larger than the little one wherein his mother alone is the undisputed queen. Our twofold consecration to the Blessed Virgin as queen and mother underscores one thing: Mary is the sovereign of our entire life – whether public or private! May our dependence on her only be surpassed by our trust in her! O Mother of the Word Incarnate! Despise not our petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer us! Amen!