

Homily for Tuesday of the 19th Week of Ordinary Time / Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe (14 August 2018)

(Mt18:1-5,10,12-14) St. Maximilian Kolbe once said: “The deadliest poison of our times is indifference.” We’ve heard it before: “One religion is as good as another.” Another variation on this same error says: “One version of me is as good as another.” This mediocrity was never the apostles’ mentality. In today’s gospel, they wanted to know who was the greatest. Jesus replied emphatically, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” There are two takes on childhood. Both have something to teach us. At his best, a child has boundless trust in his parents, from whom he has received absolutely everything. At his worst, a child is a bantam bundle of concupiscence, whose first intuition is diametrically opposed to his parents’ better judgment. For this child, life is counterintuitive. Well, so is Christ’s gospel for us adults! However, most adults aren’t willing to unlearn everything because we lack the child’s docility. “Whoever humbles himself like this little child,” said Jesus, “is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Children also have guardian angels who always look upon the face of Jesus’ heavenly Father. When our Lord revealed this truth, humanity still lacked its most powerful intercessor, since His mother, Mary, had not yet become our mother too under the cross. Her spiritual maternity would prove to be a game changer. Profound appreciation of this fact was the principal insight of today’s saint, and it came to him as a child. Little Raymond Kolbe was so mischievous that his mother once exclaimed, “Raymond, what is to become of you?” Later, while prayerfully pondering over this question in church, our Lady appeared to him holding two crowns – a white one for purity and a red one for martyrdom. Raymond chose both! Because our Lady was bestowing crowns, it was only natural that in later life our saint would see himself as a knight serving in the army of his heavenly queen. Although content to remain forever within Mary’s maternal embrace, we too must fight for a time under her royal standard in the spiritual war that Satan declared against God.

“Modern times are dominated by Satan,” said Fr. Kolbe, “and will be more so in the future. The conflict with hell cannot be engaged by men, even the most clever. The Immaculata alone has from God the promise of victory.” (See Gen3:15) Like many other things in Christ’s gospel, victory can also be counterintuitive. Our Lord once said, “Whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel shall save it.” (Mk8:35) Strictly speaking, Fr. Kolbe didn’t die for Christ’s sake, so he was only beatified as a confessor. He was, nevertheless, canonized as a martyr because he did die as a heroic witness for Christ’s gospel of love. When a fellow prisoner escaped at Auschwitz, ten others were selected to die in reprisal. One of them exclaimed, “What will happen to my family?” Fr. Kolbe wasn’t indifferent to his plight. He died in the condemned man’s place. We too can live as martyrs of love, but one thing prevents us. From mediocrity, O Lord, deliver us! Amen!