

As follows in Jesus' name:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And 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. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ...

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

On this day when we are observing God's gift of the holy angels, those powerful, wise, & holy beings, our text directs our attention to the spiritual gift of... humility... which might seem a little odd.

But what is Jesus' point?

To be "great" in the kingdom of heaven is not to be our goal; that is a gift that the Lord gives according to His own grace.

But Jesus exposes the evil of our thoughts of and desires for greatness when He demonstrates how it leads us to make comparisons with each other

(probably like the disciples were doing among themselves, or even, over and against the prophets who had come before them).

But such thoughts and desires are very worldly... and really temptations of pride.

And Jesus pulls out one such example when He set the child in their midst and said,

"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

This humility Jesus speaks of is the humility to always be learning and listening to God's Word, and repenting of sins learned of, and clinging to Jesus' life and death for forgiveness, and desiring to amend their sinful life in thanksgiving for their new life given in Christ.

On the other hand, how many, because of their Christian education and early catechesis, consider themselves to be masters of the Christian faith,

and so, neglect to humbly hear and heed their heavenly Father's Word?

They think they know enough and that they have retained all that they learned in the Catechism, though they cannot recite it, nor the passages that they previously learned to prove their knowledge.

This is the kind of pride and seeking for greatness that Jesus rebukes here.

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Do you remember Jesus being indignant with His disciples previously

when they were rebuking parents who brought their children to be blessed by Jesus?^{Mark10:13-15}

What were His disciples thinking?

That Jesus was too busy? too important? too tired? to be bothered with little children.

We look at that, and think, "how could those disciples do that?" Shame on them.

But are they so different from us?

We might not ever imagine ourselves telling kids to stop coming to Jesus but aren't we keeping them from Jesus, holding them back,

when we, as their transportation, don't bring them to Him?

When we don't attend the Divine Service or Sunday school/Bible Class with them?
Or when we don't teach them to read their Bibles daily or regularly through the example we set by our family devotions?
Or when we don't teach them to pray at meals, or when they get up or go to bed, or at difficult times in their lives, or in thanksgiving for His blessings?

Are we encouraging the parents, as grandparents, as friends, as Christian brothers and sisters to "stay and do their duty"?

Encouraging them to come and bring their children?

Encouraging them by offering your assistance as you see needs?

By praying for them and supporting them as you have opportunity, letting them know that you appreciate their efforts to bring your little brothers & sisters to Jesus.

Or perhaps, at times, you find yourself comparing how you raise, or raised, your family with how others are raising theirs.

With how you did it in the good ol' days?

Do you find yourself looking down on others when their children act out or cause disruption?

Or proudly comparing how you behaved in childhood with how today's children behave?

Or maybe, at times, you consider the way that you saw, heard, or experienced the previous generation's raising their children and you look down on them for the sad state of affairs you see around you?

You think that you will or do have it all in hand and know what ought to be or have been done.

And you know what, children? You are not immune from pride or desire for greatness either at times.

Have you ever thought that you know how to do a better job of parenting than your parents?

Or said to yourself, "When I grow up, I will never make my kids eat foods they don't like."?

Or, "I'll never make my kids go to church if they don't want to."?

But all these examples are really the same expressions of our own lust for greatness as the disciples had when they asked Jesus "**Who is the greatest?**"

But this greatness is only in our own eyes. It is not the greatness that Jesus teaches us.

Instead, true and godly greatness is found in humility,

not looking down on others, but looking up to them, considering everyone as worthy of your service.

Seeing each person as your "fellow redeemed by Jesus' blood" so that you may have compassion and a desire to serve them, rather than expecting their services for yourself.

And here is where Jesus pulls in the example of the angels.

Jesus warns, "**See that you do not despise one of these little ones.**

For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

Even the holy, powerful, angelic beings who see the Father's face in heaven, do not despise the child they serve; they do not think their charge to be unimportant or insignificant.

Nor do they disdain the service they render to their child, but hold it as it is: a sacred trust from God and do it with all their might and resources.

Kids, just think about that. Your heavenly Father thinks you are so special,
that He sends angels to protect and serve you.

But even more special than that is that Your heavenly Father sent His own Son Jesus Christ
to become a child Himself and when He grew up, to suffer and die to forgive you,
your sins of pride and your sinful desire to be called the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

...

But the disciples' question is a good one to answer, when it is not asked from selfish intent.

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Isn't it obvious that the position of “greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven” belongs to Jesus & Him alone;
greater than all the saints whom He died to save,
and greater also than the holy angels, who He commands.

After all, isn't He the One, who though He is God, came down to serve each and every one of us,
men, women, & children, making Himself the servant of all?

He's the One who showed the disciples their errors and gave them grace to welcome God's little ones.

He's the One who encouraged the parents to bring their children and blessed them.

He's the One who warns us of temptations to seek greatness with selfish intent.

He's the One who teaches us not to hinder the children, let alone all nations, from coming to Him
in Holy Baptism so that He would wash their sins away, bless them with faith,
and make them heirs with Him in the kingdom of heaven.

He's the One who gave up His life and spilt His blood so that even the proud may be forgiven
and the kingdom of heaven opened to you.

He's the One who sends the Holy Spirit to remove the heart of pride and the lust for greatness,
and in its place gives you a heart of humility to serve greatest and least with mercy and compassion.

He's the Prince of Heaven who sends His mighty, holy angels to serve and protect His holy Church
against the powers of the devil and his minions.

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So, Fellow Redeemed and Little Children of your heavenly Father, receive the blessing of the Lord,
knowing that by the great Jesus Christ Himself, your pride and all your sins are forgiven,
and that no matter what your greatness status might be, you are an heir of the kingdom of heaven.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria