

JESUS AND CHILDREN

Taken from the book of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j. "To be Like Jesus" published by the Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.

Intent aof these Notes

These notes were prepared for Teachers and Parents. Later on they were given to general public.

To help them to put on the attitudes Jesus had towards children.

To grow in the love of children and deal with them in a sympathetic and humane manner.

To grow in 'child-likeness'.

Short Inroduction.

- **In Jewish society, in the time of Jesus, children had no rights.**
- **Children, women and slaves were lumped together as inferior members of society.**
- **Women were sort of possessions to their Husbands, Children to their parents, and slaves to their masters.**
- **It's remarkable that when children were not given any importance or respect, Jesus showed such great respect, love, and concern for them.**
- **No founder of religion or any great man in those days, treated children as fondly as Jesus did.**

PROCEDURE

1. Gospel Study

Read and reflect on the N.T. quotes below and answer to the questions following them

Mt. 19:13-16, Lk 18:15-17	Jesus blesses and accepts little children.
Mt. 11: 25-26	God reveals his mysteries to the little ones.
Mt. 18: 2- 8	Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?
Mt. 18:9-10	Do not despise little children.
Mt. 21:15-16	God's praises come from the mouths of children.
Jn. 3:3-11	To enter the Kingdom of God, we have to be born again.

2. Questions for Reflection, Study, Sharing and Discussion

First Step. Study and Reflect Alone

1. from the Gospel reading, what were the attitudes Jesus showed towards children compared to those of his disciples, the Pharisees and of the common folks in Jesus days?
2. How should we, Jesus' followers, deal and relate with children? Describe.

3. What good qualities and virtues did Jesus discover and love in children?
4. What 'child-like' qualities can you discover in the person of Jesus? Compile a list of them.
5. Give instances of how Jesus related in a "child-like manner" with God - His Abba- His Heavenly Father as well with people in general?
6. Is it possible to be a follower of Jesus without being 'child-like'? Why?
7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Give reasons.
 - ✓ To be a Christian is to be 'child-like'.
 - ✓ Jesus never grew old.
 - ✓ Hell is the only place where there are no children.
 - ✓ At the gate of heaven there is a plaque that reads: "Only children and their likes allowed".

Second Step; Common Sharing and Discussion

3. Thoughts for Teaching or Input

a) The child-likeness of Jesus

- Jesus was a child-like person. Friendly, alive, intuitive, sincere, consistent, authentic, true, joyous, full of feeling, easy to deal with, spontaneous, generous, tender, simple, etc.
- Jesus loved children because he himself was 'child-like'. He possessed the very qualities he loved in children. Like them, he was genuine, transparent, friendly, simple, humble, trusting, etc.
- The entire life of Jesus was just living out the nature of a child. Quote Gospel passages to prove that Jesus possessed the qualities of a child.
 - Genuine: He cried, he got angry, he felt hungry, he enjoyed the company of friends, he loved Nature, etc.
 - Transparent: He never deceived anyone; all knew where they stood with Jesus, no falsehood, pretence, hypocrisy, etc.
 - Friendly: With his disciples, John, Mary Magdalene, Martha, Lazarus, sinners, the poor, the outcast, the downtrodden, etc.
 - Alive: To people and situations - At Cana: No wine; At Naim: The widow's affliction; In the Temple: The poor woman's mite, etc.
 - Intuitive: His quick and witty replies to the Pharisees and his opponents (Taxes to be paid to Caesar, adulterous woman, etc.)
 - Perceptive: Of Nature (*flowers, rains, etc.*), people, events of life, persons' characters, etc.
 - Full of feeling: Feeling compassion for the crowds (*multiplication of bread and fishes*), affection towards children, compassion for the suffering, etc.
 - Forgiving: Forgiving sinners, Peter, Matthew, the Good Thief, the Adulterous Woman, his executioners, etc.

b) Jesus Expects Us, his Disciples to be like Him- 'child-like' and 'child – loving'

- To be a Christian means to be Jesus-like, namely child-like as Jesus.
- The mysteries of God, the teachings of the Gospel can be grasped only by little children and their likes.
- The beatitudes can be understood and practised only by 'child-like' people.
- Sophisticated, cynical and self-sufficient people have no place in the Kingdom of God.
- All duplicity, political manoeuvring and chicanery are alien to the spirit of the Gospel.
- Jesus warned us: When you speak, say YES or NO! Any other thing you say comes from the evil one.

c) Difficulties We May Encounter to Become 'child-like'

- Due to our past education and training, we shall have to undo much of what we have been taught and of what we practised for long years!
- We shall have to shed the ways and the values of the world we live in. There is nothing much of 'child-likeness' in our world and society.
- Our world is one of sophistication, deceit, crookedness, duplicity, diplomacy, pretence, expediency.
- We shall have to go likely against the ways and values of our own homes, families and friends. "One's worst enemies" Jesus said, "are the members of one's own family".
- Our friends and relatives will make all efforts to keep us 'sensible', 'serious', 'formal', 'well-behaved', 'grown-up'!
- They will try to keep us 'in-line'. They will use all possible gimmicks to keep us 'well-adjusted' to the 'anti-evangelical' and sophisticated market values of today.
- We shall have to face misunderstandings, rejection and the loss of old friends.

d) To be like Jesus we have to love Children

- If we are 'child-like,' spontaneously, we shall love children and feel at home with them.
- To the extent we do not love children; we have already lost our childlikeness.
- To love children would mean that we feel true affection, tenderness and fondness for them, that we are attracted to their Jesus-like qualities.
- Our love for children should not be only idealistic or sentimental, but sort of a natural affinity both with children and also with those – young or old persons - who are Jesus-like.

e) Loving Children Means

- To understand them, their needs, wants and aspirations.
- To respect them as human beings.

- To accept them as children with their weakness and shortcomings.
- To safeguard their rights.
- To spend time with them and enjoy their company.
- To be able to talk and listen to them and relate with them as equals.
- To feel at ease in their company.
- Even to play with them.
- To let go of our ‘pomposity’, ‘officiousness’, ‘formality’, ‘self-importance’, ‘superiority’.

f) Benefits From Loving Children

- We shall easily become ‘child-like’.
- We shall be ‘Jesus-like’.
- We shall grow in humility, simplicity, joy, genuineness, meekness, peace of mind.
- We shall feel satisfied, happy, relaxed, free, fulfilled.
- We shall become ‘loveable’ and ‘loving’.
- We shall find it easy to practise the Gospel, the evangelical virtues and beatitudes.
- Our prayer life will be simple, meaningful and consoling.
- In all truth, we shall be able to call God ‘Our Father’.

APPENDIX: Checking your ‘Child-likeness’
A test to find out how childlike we are

Part One: CHECK LIST Instructions:

Rate yourself. Ratings will be from 1 to 5

The value of the ratings being:

- (5) Very good
- (4) Good
- (3) Satisfactory
- (2) Fair
- (1) Poor

Do I Love Children as Jesus loved them?

	<u>Score</u>
1. Do I search for children’s company, say: at parties, at home visits, in the garden, at games, etc.?	()
2. In the company of children, can I come down to their level?	()
3. Do I have patience while dealing with children? Do I accept them as they are - fickle-minded, distracted?	()
4. Do I spend time with them? Do I feel at ease with them?	()
5. Do I enjoy playing with them?	()
6. Do I talk with them? Do they talk with me?	()

- 7. Do I have friends among them? Do they consider me their friend? ()
- 8. Do I show children the regard and respect I show towards grown-up ()
- 9. Do I take them seriously? ()
- 10. Do I respect their rights? Do I defend them when they are ill treated? ()

Am I 'Child-like' as Jesus was?

- 11. Am I genuine, open and guileless? ()
- 12. Am I honest, sincere and transparent? ()
- 13. Am I friendly, pleasant and loyal to people? ()
- 14. Am I spontaneous, enthusiastic and full of life? ()
- 15. Do I trust people? Do I accept them? ()
- 16. Am I free of prejudices and biases? ()
- 17. Am I affectionate, full of feeling and emotions like Jesus? ()
- 18. Am I generous like Jesus? ()
- 19. Am I alert, perceptive and understanding like Jesus? ()

Total Score ()

The Value of the total score is:

- 10 to 20: poor**
- 21 to 40: fair**
- 41 to 60: satisfactory**
- 61 to 80: good**
- 81 to 100: very good**

Part two: REFLECTION ON MY TOTAL SCORE

- ✓ First, find out your total score.
- ✓ Then, ask yourself the questions below:
(Put your replies in writing)

Question One: Are you happy with your score? Why?

Question Two: Do you wish to improve it? Why?

Question Three: What steps will you take to improve it?

Step 1

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Step 2

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Step 3

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Closure:

My Prayer to Jesus: Write a prayer to Jesus asking him to help you to become 'child- like' like him.