

SANTO NINO

Dear brothers and sisters, as we heard at the beginning of this Eucharist, the devotion to the Holy Child, Santo Nino, is the oldest and most popular in the Philippines. Certainly with good reason, because God wanted to come among us in the image of a child. By welcoming this image of the Holy Child, the former rulers of these Philippine islands embraced Christ and passed him on to you. I have no doubt that you are very familiar with the history of this tradition. But beyond the folklore that the feast of Santo Nino may reveal, let's try to identify what God wants to tell us through it and in his word that we have just heard. Without, however, neglecting the other readings, which are also rich in teachings for us, I would like to focus my homily on the Gospel chosen for this occasion. If God comes to us by being born into our humanity, Jesus seems to be saying that we can only receive him in this way, as he comes to us as a child.

Let the children come to me, do not hold them back, for the kingdom of god is for those who look like them... he held them and blessed them by laying his hands on them (Mk 10, 13-16). Those whom man tends to neglect, reject or push away are the very ones whom God welcomes with joy and to whom he gives importance. Very often, we approach others out of interest, with a specific goal in mind, in search of some advantage. Our relationships are established in terms of calculation, of gain. And the person who brings us nothing deserves very little of our consideration and attention. Not so with GOD, who sees in every human being a soul to be saved, a spirit to be healed, a heart to be comforted, a being to be cared for and in need of love. God reminds us of the importance of remaining and resembling children. Children remain in a state of becoming, always open to listening, to growth and to change. Flexible and easier to mould, the child's heart knows how to open up to the new things proposed by those who wish him well. Children can sense the perfection and stability of eternity, and this sensation shapes their sense of obedience and joy in life. It doesn't take much to make a child happy, because the most important thing is the parental and family love they receive. And if our hearts are to become the hearts of children, we must enter into the logic of conversion; knowing how to live soberly and with the little we have at our disposal, but also making ourselves available for our inner transformation, in order to receive love, graces and blessings from the Lord.

God is always touched by what is simple, humble, gentle and true. He lets himself be approached by those who believe in his love and put their hope in his name. Children are distinguished by their innocence, the sincerity that characterises them and, above all, their purity of heart and mind. To welcome a child is to welcome the innocence of a heart that asks only to be loved. In a world where so many children are uneducated, where others are dying of starvation, abused and forced to do hard labour, the heart of man needs to be converted to resemble that of God, who does not hesitate to welcome and bless children. Children are presented to JESUS for blessing, but the disciples reject them, as if going to God is a privilege reserved only for certain people and not for others. Very often, when our power is abused, we become an obstacle for others, preventing them from benefiting from the divine graces and opportunities offered to all. But allowing children to go to God means showing them the best possible path, passing on to them the values of faith and love that come from God. It also means becoming, in our turn, bridges between the past, the present and the future. Welcoming children also means learning from them, learning simplicity and purity, availability and service. Because that's where it all starts, and that's where the true path of humility, self-abasement and inner poverty is established. Happy and blessed feast of Santo Nino.