

Read also Deuteronomy 1:20-39. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org.

Today you might see politicians kissing babies or taking pictures with them but it is not thought that any particular blessing arises from it.

However, the father of a three-year-old girl who was left almost without a scratch after being pinned under a small bus that rolled over on her has credited her miraculous escape to the power of God. She was blessed by Pope Benedict XVI when a baby and her father believes that is why she received this miracle survival.¹

In Jewish families today, blessings of children are a regular, weekly occurrence. A father prays for his son asking God to make him like Ephraim and Manasseh, who were two of Joseph's sons in the Bible. They pray that blessing because those brothers were the first two brothers in the Bible who did not fight with each other. They were also known for their good deeds. The blessing for daughters is to ask God to make them like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. These four women are noteworthy because they were strong women who kept faith in tough times.

However, children have not always been considered so highly. Although parents in Bible times believed that touching a holy man would confer blessing, children were generally seen as weak, unimportant, and not to be idealized. Thus the behavior of the disciples was the norm. After all, Jesus had more important things to do and more important people to meet; he did not have time for children – or so they thought. Hear the story. READ Mark 10:13-16.

Jesus is indignant over his disciples' behavior. He didn't like it at all. He was offended. Mark tells us little about Jesus' emotions, stating that once He was compassionate; another time, angry. Here He wasn't just angry, He was outraged. He commands them to stop forbidding children.

Now if you were with someone really important – the head of a corporation, or the president of something, and they were leading a seminar or holding a board meeting – you probably would not expect them to turn their attention to people's children. Even adults would have to be important to gain access to someone that important.

But Jesus said, "Let them come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such people as children."

Jesus, the Son of God, has a different view of personal importance. So we need to ask, what is so important about children?

Is it their innocence, simplicity, or uncomplicated faith? Is it their lack of power and self-importance?

Nowhere else has Jesus talked about the kingdom *belonging* to anyone, but he does here. What is at stake is who enters the Kingdom of God. What is it about children?

¹<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/a-miraculous-escape-for-the-little-girl-the-pope-blessed-20110217-1ayaf.html>, (Sydney Morning Herald), accessed 6/20/12.

I spent some time with my two granddaughters this week – Lauren is visiting from California. I've been observing. And, I've noticed that children have no problem asking for blessing. They freely ask for what they want.

- They constantly want your attention and long for you to listen to them
- When they are afraid or get hurt, they quickly come to you for solace
- They expect you to solve their grievances with one another; to judge who's right and wrong (and for you to vindicate them!)
- They express joy and sorrow, love and justice easily
- They will try to accomplish something – running fast or jumping high, and they want you to watch and cheer
- They are willing to recognize authority and be obedient
- They will copy what you do
- They do not love out of desire, but out of belonging

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (v. 14)

Childlikeness, in relation to God.

I thought I might ask you – okay, how are you doing in these areas? But then we would make it into a list of duties, and relationship built on duty is pretty tough and not very personal. So who best shows us how to do this? I thought of Jesus. How does Jesus, as a human person, walking on earth like us, relate to God?

Here are some of the ways:

- Jesus approached His ministry saying, "My Father is working, and I also am working" (Jn 5:17). He said, "The Father loves the Son and includes Him in everything He is doing" (Jn 5:20)
- He said, "The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing" (Jn 5:18).
- He talked to God before doing anything,
 - He asked for advice when choosing the disciples
 - He thanked God before feeding thousands of people
 - He went to God for solace when John the Baptist was killed
 - He prayed before raising Lazarus from the dead
- He did not understand the disciples' fear and lack of faith in the storm at sea, for He had the total faith of a child.
- Once He was hungry and saw a fig tree. When He found no figs on the tree, He cursed it. The disciples heard Him. The next day when they passed by, they saw the tree withered away to its roots. They couldn't believe it! Jesus told them, "If you have faith in God, you can say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you." (Mk 11:12-14, 20-23)
- Another time Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and the answer to His prayer was no, and He simply obeyed.

Jesus had profound childlike faith and trust in God at all times and at all cost.

So what does God want from us? Let's take a look at the passage from Deuteronomy.

²¹ Look! He has placed the land in front of you. Go and occupy it as the LORD has promised you. Don't be afraid! Don't be discouraged!

²⁵ The scouts explored the land, brought back some of its fruit, reporting, 'The land the LORD has given us is indeed a good land.'²⁶ "But you rebelled against the command of your God and refused to go in. ²⁷ You complained in your tents and said, 'The LORD must hate us . . . We even saw giants there!"²⁹ "But I said to you, 'Don't be shocked or afraid of them!' ³⁰ The LORD is going ahead of you. He will fight for you, just as you saw him do in Egypt.

³¹ And you saw how the LORD your God cared for you all along the way as you traveled through the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child. Now he has brought you to this place.'³² "But even after all he did, you refused to trust the LORD your God, ³³ who goes before you looking for the best places to camp, guiding you with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.

³⁹ I will give the land to your little ones -- your innocent children. You were afraid they would be captured, but they will be the ones who occupy it.

They had to stay in the desert. But their children, who are naturally trusting, got to go into the land.

Wow, this is getting quite personal. But it's nothing we can't remedy.

One of those reasons I am here today, striving to be a disciple with full trust in God always, is because as a little child, I was taken to church week after week and something happened there. I remember being drawn to God there. The grownups were loving to me – like you. I learned and accepted Jesus' love as a child. The grownups there comforted me when I was hurt and grieved – like you. They – like you do for the children here – prayed for me and taught me. They, like you, believed. They loved me, not out of desire or their own interests but out of service. They laid aside their self-importance so they could love God and in turn, love me.

Children do not assert their power and self-importance. They are dependent and humble. They therefore have every right to approach Jesus and be blessed by Him. Do you want every right to approach Jesus and be blessed by Him?

Trust and believe with childlike faith.

It's easy. Let go of your personal authority because it clashes with God. Then receive freely as a child. Ask for what you want, obedient and ready to follow as His child. He is ready and willing right now to bless you with all good things.

AMEN