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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

[patrickjmarrin@gmail.com](mailto:patrickjmarrin@gmail.com).

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“The favoring hand of my God was upon me” (Nehemiah 2:8).

Because God was regarded as so ineffable, Jews did not presume to pronounce the divine name or create images to worship. Angels were messengers between God and humans, intermediaries who could move between the spiritual and material realms to communicate God’s will. The Bible is filled with encounters between people and angels, including the moment Mary was overshadowed by the Spirit in the presence of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation.

Jesus uses an unusual and intimate image to convey the closeness of children to God by telling his disciples that “their angels in heaven always look at the face of my heavenly Father.” Children are the model for greatness in the Kingdom of heaven because in their innocence they make transparent the divine presence.

Using our modern media devices, we speak of having “face time” with one another to suggest screen intimacy, even though we are learning that so-called virtual encounters lack the power of real face-to-face intimacy, even as virtual friends collected on our hand-held devices bear faint resemblance to actual friends. Social media have created vast networks of personal interaction without generating actual communities or overcoming the loneliness of individuals presenting themselves to the crowd. Only when we share life with others, risking our privacy to reveal ourselves to them, do we understand the challenges and joys of finding true companions, a word that means sharing bread with others.

Jesus' praise of children as constantly in the divine gaze makes even more horrific the abuse of children by adults. Whether individual or as a result of callous policies and systemic indifference, any action that traumatizes a child is an affront to God and a sin against the Holy Spirit. Persons and nations that inflict suffering on the innocent will be held accountable in history. Those who advocate for children and protect them are among the greatest in the eyes of God.

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