Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

## Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

September 18, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (Mark 9:37).

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*Wis 2:12, 17-20; Ps 54; Jas 3:16—4:3; Mark 9:30-37*

Pope Francis is back in Rome after completing his pastoral visit to Hungary and Slovakia. One theme evident in news coverage of the trip is the pope's special attention to children and to the most vulnerable of people, including the sick, the elderly and the minority communities like the Roma.  The emphasis is clear and deliberate as a visual statement that will survive even as the pope's many eloquent speeches fade from memory.

Mark describes Jesus taking a child in his arms to counter his disciples' notions of greatness. They had been arguing among themselves about who is the most important.  Jesus turns their ambition upside down by calling the child the greatest, the one most likely to enter the Kingdom of God first. In fact, Jesus says, anyone who welcomes a child like this is welcoming him, and whoever welcomes him, welcomes God.

Why is a child so powerful? Why do the weakest and most vulnerable among us warrant this kind of attention? Perhaps it is because they have the power to invoke in the rest of us a response that makes us more loving, more compassionate and more human.  On the other hand, worldly power, social status and celebrity recognition often make people more self-focused, alert to their own importance,

however illusory, and can even make them selfish and indifferent to the needs of others. Let someone else take care of those at the margins; I am too busy with bigger things, larger duties and decisions, to be concerned with crying children, the sick or elderly.

But for Jesus, they are precisely where God is present, and anyone who stops to pay attention to them encounters the mystery of God, where the deepest graces lie hidden. This is the path to true greatness and genuine holiness. Whatever the results of our service to the needy, we are the ones transformed. We are invited to a more personal encounter with God.

*Revised from 2015.*

Advertisement