
9 TUESDAY

Tuesday, 19th Week Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 31: 1 - 8
Deut. 32: 3,4,7-9,12
Matt. 18: 1-5, 10, 12-14

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ?” We might think it was a silly question to ask Jesus. Surely there are more important questions, about life and suffering and love and justice and so on. His disciples got an answer and a demonstration they couldn’t have expected, when Jesus called over a child playing nearby and put him (or her ? why do we always think it was a boy ?) standing before them. Listening to what Jesus then said, it’s clear there aren’t any silly questions. But the answers He gives us may well be unexpected and surprising. What question do I have for Jesus ?

To become like children, whose angels constantly see the face of God. What Jesus says goes much beyond our natural instinct of cherishing young children. He implies a respect for children which, despite our cherishing, can be absent in the way we actually treat children, talk about them, talk to them, expect them to behave.

Unfortunately, child abuse, in many forms, is not something new in the world. It’s often been tolerated, or hidden from public view. The internet and social media, and revelations of such abuse even within religious institutions, has brought the whole matter more into public awareness, and stronger abhorrence and condemnation of those responsible. Yet abuse still continues, physical, emotional, mental, economic, ranging from the truly vicious and violent to careless, perhaps unconscious “acceptable” behaviour and attitudes towards children.

For Christians listening to today’s gospel, surely there can be no doubt about the question of abuse, any abuse. “See that you do not despise one of these little ones”.