

Homily based on the readings from August 11, 2026 (Ezekiel 2.8-3.4;
Matthew 18.1-5, 10, 12-14)

There is a fundamental difference, which gets lost on many people, between being *childish* and being *childlike*. One of these attitudes is always bad – particularly for adults – while the other is always good. *Childishness* embodies all the *negative* qualities associated with children: selfishness, impatience, impulsiveness, irritability.

Childlikeness, on the other hand, represents all the *positive* qualities: openness, generosity, obedience, wonder. One of the greatest challenges of growing into Christian adulthood is setting aside our *childishness* while still retaining our *childlikeness*. On the one hand, we have to follow the example of Saint Paul:

When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child,
reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things.

On the other hand, we need to remember the words from today's Gospel: "unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven."

When we consider the intellectual giants of our faith – Ambrose, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas – their accomplishments are so far beyond anything we could *possibly* achieve that it seems inaccurate, even disrespectful, to describe these individuals as *childlike*. Nevertheless, that is exactly what they are. Earlier in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes this point explicitly:

I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. (11.25)

All of the great theologians and Doctors of the Church – regardless of how the *world* rated their intellect and abilities – recognized their utter inferiority to Jesus Christ. When compared with God's infinite

knowledge and wisdom, the keenest insights of the greatest thinkers amount to nothing more than the babbling of a baby.

It is difficult to imagine a saint who more fully embodies this childlike fidelity than Clare of Assisi, whose memorial we are celebrating today. Along with her mentor Saint Francis, Clare dedicated the totality of her life to simple, unassuming service. Her model for childlikeness, of course, was none other than the Christ Child himself. As she once marvelled in a letter to Saint Agnes of Prague:

Behold his poverty even as he was laid in the manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. What wondrous humility, what marvelous poverty! The King of angels, the Lord of heaven and earth resting in a manger!

In other words, since the King of the Universe became a child for all of *us*, none of us has any right to complain about becoming a child for *him*. As children, our fundamental duty is to reflect the imperishable love that radiates from our Heavenly Father. To quote Saint Clare once again, we

must all “become vessels of God’s compassionate love for others” – serving each of his beloved children just as we would serve his Only Begotten Son.