Tuesday of the Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 18:1-5, 10, 12-14): The disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

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Fr. Valentí ALONSO i Roig
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Today, the Gospel once again reveals to us the very heart of God. It helps us understand the feelings with which our heavenly Father acts toward His children. His deepest concern is for the little ones—those whom no one notices, those who never seem to reach the places where everyone else arrives. We already knew that the Father, being the good Father that He is, has a special love for His smallest children. But today, we discover yet another desire of His—one that becomes an obligation for us: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

We can see, then, that what the Father values is not so much being small as it is making oneself small. “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:4). This means we have a responsibility in this process of becoming small. It is not simply a matter of being created little or simple, limited or gifted in greater or lesser ways, but rather of freely setting aside whatever greatness we may have in order to remain at the level of the most humble and simple. Our true greatness lies in becoming like one of these little ones whom Jesus Himself places before us—real and tangible, with a face and eyes.

Finally, today's Gospel widens the scope of this lesson. There are "little ones" very close to us—sometimes more neglected than others: those who are like sheep that have gone astray. The Father goes out in search of them, and when He finds them, He rejoices to bring them back home, so that none will be lost. Perhaps if we looked at those around us as sheep sought out and restored by the Father—rather than simply as lost sheep—we would more often and more clearly recognize the face of God in them. As Saint Asterius of Amasea reminds us: "The parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd teaches us not to lose hope too quickly in others, nor to grow weary in helping those who are in danger."

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- " I am a very little soul who can offer only very little things to God." (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux)

- "What exactly does being a child consist of? In the sense of Jesus Christ, it means learning to say 'Father'. Only if the filial existence lived by Jesus is preserved, the man can enter with the Son into divinity." (Benedict XVI)

- "At the end of the parable of the lost sheep Jesus recalled that God's love excludes no one: 'So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish' (Mt 18:14) (...)" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 605)