



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"A Time for Milk"**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Isaiah 59:9-19
Second Reading Hebrews 5:12-6:1,9-12
Gospel Mark 10:46-52

A few months ago, in a fit of nostalgia, I ordered a set of DVD's from Amazon. It was the first season of a show from the mid 1950's called "Spin and Marty". Actually, it was only a fifteen-minute segment of a longer show known as the "Mickey Mouse Club" that was known and loved by children my age. Every day I would look forward to seeing the tubes inside our black and white TV set warm up so that I could watch my favorite program. The "Spin and Marty" segment was about a bunch of boys on what we called a Western "dude ranch" back when 'dude' meant an inexperienced city-dweller. They learned to ride and rope, and grew up together. Watching the series today, I was amazed at how naive it all seemed- how awful most of the acting was, how simplistic the scripts, and how blatant the morals. But something else occurred to me, too: the show was innocent. There were no hidden meanings to the lines, no irony. The children were portrayed like children without the sarcasm that makes contemporary television so overloaded with really obnoxious kids who are portrayed as knowing more than any of the adults. I watched the program amazed at how simple my life must have been when I was five years old. I reflected that original Mouseketeers seemed to grow up to be like squeaky-clean Annette Funicello. In the early 90's, a remake of the Mickey Mouse Club show featured soon-to-be sleaze artists Justin Timberlake and Brittany Spears who are now, well...*not* squeaky clean. I was glad to have become more sophisticated in the last half century, but was

also thankful for the experience of having been a child back then, and probably for longer than our children are allowed to today.

What do we do to our children today? We give them pretty good educations, and expose them to experiences and adventures that we could only dream about in the 1950's. But at the same time we force them to grow up far too quickly. This is not only the result of the school of life itself- we had that experience in my childhood too. Today, though, we are so fearful of our children being left behind that we accelerate their maturity to light speed and then wonder what went wrong.

I have been to far too many events in the last few years: wedding receptions, dance recitals, school programs and even church dinners in which children have been encouraged to perform. Their attempts at folk songs, or classical dance have been blandly received. But when some tiny little girl performs a pop song, and particularly if it involves provocative dance moves, the parents go wild. Of course, this is what they see on TV, so I suppose the adults think that this "encouragement" is what is expected of them if their little ones are to become stars. But it is horrifying to see young children in makeup and what can only be described as sexy outfits being expected to engage in behavior that would be inappropriate for their *mothers*, let alone of a child of 10 or 12. We all cringed at the performance films of the murdered child-model Jon-Benet Ramsey years ago, but that is what I see here in Manila all the time. I don't know what parents are thinking when they allow or even encourage such behavior, but it has terrible implications for their children's future if they think that being *sexy* is how to get recognition. God save such children from Subic Bay!

I am being blunt today because I am concerned: concerned about a loss of innocence. It's not that I want to keep children ignorant and naïve. But I mourn for them if they are being robbed of something that is not only sweet and beautiful, but also necessary for the development of their personalities and their souls.

Hidden like a diamond in the coal mine of today's epistle reading from Hebrews we find an exasperated comment on the part of the author about the people he's writing to: "You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is

not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." The author is complaining about his readers' tendency to get hung up on unimportant things. He wants them to move on as soon as they can to a more mature approach to their faith. But he makes the point that it is the mature, not children- those who have had the training necessary to make moral choices who can be expected to understand this. "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity," he writes. His point is about spiritual maturity, of course, not child rearing, but the principle of a developed maturity is the same.

We should not presume that everyone is at the same level, either when it comes to personal development, as in children, or in spiritual development as, well- most of the rest of us. That is why we not only provide Sunday School here, but also adult education. Our current adult study is called "The Bible from Scratch" and it is there precisely to make sure that we all have the basics before we go on to more "solid food." Even old bible hands like me are discovering new things about the Scripture, and that's true about virtually every other aspect of life, too, for those who truly want to grow. To jump ahead and to presume that we are further advanced in our spiritual journey than we actually are will surely get us into trouble, because we will have missed some of the most important lessons to be learned along the way.

In his letter to the Corinthians, St Paul once wrote: "When I was a child I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." This is very true, but an important word there is *when*. Paul doesn't say it was bad to be a child, just not a place to stay the rest of his life. And of course, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself when he wanted to give an example of *childlike*, as opposed to *childish* trust, put a child in the center of the apostolic band and said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms and he blessed them. "As a *little child*," not as Justin or Brittany- not as a made-up beauty queen falsely matured before her time because it looks "cute".

Parents and grandparents and parent figures, for the sake of the next generations, let your children *be* children. And then help them to grow up, but not before they're

good and ready! The innocence of youth is a valuable and holy treasure, let's not squander it more than we already do.