

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Children's Negative Perceptions Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday,
August 16, 2014 8:15 AM Ez 18:1-10, 113b, 30-32; **Mt 19:13-15** (St. Stephen of
Hungary; BVM) (Jesus blesses the children.)

“Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

This is actually a rather sad story. Parents evidently are bringing children for Jesus to bless, to lay his hands on them. He has this statement that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Now even we in our everyday perceptions talk about **the innocence of children**. We perceive that. The problem is children don't perceive that. **Children do not perceive that they are the stuff of the kingdom of heaven**, not at all. This is one of the great sadnesses of life. In fact, one practically universal experience among children is that they've been gyped of something; something has been taken away, something marvelous, something wonderful.

There are, sad to say, parents in this world who are indifferent toward their children, there are. There are mothers who really don't care for their children. There are fathers who are cruel or absent; that does exist. However, it is also true that **what children perceive is often far more negative than is actually true**. Children can say, “My mother never loved me,” when in fact her mother did all she could, or “My father never liked me,” when in fact that's not true. The perception is what governs the life of the child, which is often very negative, often fixed on the negative views of life, dark and sad, even violent sometimes, not because the environment was so bad, although sometimes it is, but very often, no. **It's because of the perception of the environment.**

Where does this come from? Probably this is what the Book of Genesis meant by the **expulsion from the garden**. In a way, when we are carried by our mothers **in their wombs**,

we are like in a garden. **We are in oneness with our mothers and, in a way, with God, who is the Creator of everything.** But that doesn't last. We are expelled from that garden and we end up in the world that seems cruel, indifferent, even when it isn't. So St. Augustine talks what **original sin: a sense of deprivation**, a sense of absence, a sense of even guilt and shame. Where does it come from? It's just there. Augustine himself blamed, actually blamed, Adam and Eve. That's probably not too helpful. **Children often blame their home life, their parents, or themselves. Sometimes they turn all this negativity toward themselves:** they are inadequate, they are not good, they should have been better, they should have been lovable, or on and on. This is the sad life of children, and it's more real to them than what we see.

In the West we interpret all this materially. So we say we have to give children more things. We have to feed them more food. We have to give them more opportunities. We have to provide them more education. **But none of those things will really help heal the original rupture. Jesus lays his hands on them. That's a clue!**