

“Children’s Letters to God”

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by Fr. Michael Dibble

It’s been one year and six weeks since we had the children’s letters to God, and that’s an annual event for me because I need them. I need them. Usually we do them in May, you know, the month of Our Lady and Mother’s Day, but we weren’t together that time. So, we’ll do them now. And, if anyone is new to this whole thing about the kids’ letters, way back in the seventies, in England, a little book was published by some Catholic nuns, “Children’s Letters to God,” written by real little kids. And they collected hundreds and they selected the ones they liked the best.

And I discovered this book in England and I loved it for two reasons. Number one, I thought, “What a great project, when I get back to being a teacher in September in the high school, for some of the kids who could use some extra credit in a religion class. I’ll say to them, and they were great kids in that school, ‘Go to your parishes all through Dutchess County and ask some little kids to write a letter to God.’ “ And they did and they accumulated over thirty years. Don’t panic! I’m only going to read a handful here, of ones they liked and I liked. That’s the reason it was a great project for some of the kids in high school.

And the second thing is I need them. I need them. Some of us priests studied theology intensely for six to eight years. And so even when we pray (Let’s say “I.”) Even when I pray, it’s theologically informed by six years of extremely specific theological profundity. And even yesterday, Saturday, when I was walking the dog, I prayed the same way. “Dear God, there’s a small family crisis again. So I’m asking your providential help. Of course, I am not sure if this is your positive will, which is for our happiness, or your permissive will, which allows troubles. I’m certainly hoping it’s the positive will, although I am an unworthy.....” You know, by THAT time, even the dog looks irritated! But I am praying according to theological profundity, instead of like a kid, “Help!” No wonder Our Lord.... You remember that great gospel where kids are rushing up to meet Our Lord and the apostles try to keep them away and Our Lord says, “Let the little kids come to me, for of such is the Kingdom of God.” And Our Lord blesses them.

So, we’re going to hear a few of them, of these letters over some years. Some of them are so old, thirty years old. They are falling apart and ones that really fell into Dead-Sea-Scroll condition, I put on index cards. And a few of them I read every year. But I have so many I am trying to rotate them. So there should be some this morning you haven’t heard before. And the ages of the kids would be between five and a half and nine. And some of these are from the original book that I found in England.

“Dear God, One of your clouds made a face today that scared me. Don’t do it again.”
And some of them have real insight: “Did you always put the right souls in the right bodies? You could make a mistake. -Cindy”

And they all sign it. They all sign these.

“Dear God, Could you write some more stories. We’ve already read all the ones you already have, and we need new ones. Gratefully, Emily”

This one was so tattered that it is on an index card. But it’s authentic. Roger was seven and a half. Lots of cartoons in some of these.

“We heard today about Hell. I don’t buy it. When people are bad you should just forget them - forget them - When they die, they disappear, and you could enjoy in Heaven the good people only, and not worry about whether you maybe sent a few good people into the fire by mistake. Think about this.”

This kid was from Milbrook, way upstate.

“God, I did not think orange went very good with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool. Thank you. Eugene.”

Now some of them had cartoons and this one had a dog who looked like an Irish Terrier, with a long beard.

“Dearest Jesus, Make it so dogs live just as long as people do. Thank you.”

Now, this is MY prayer. I mean it was written by Jonathan who later came to the high school where I taught, years later, you know, when he got to be a teenager. He was a little kid in Whopperjuice Falls. Jonathan wrote, and I put it on a card (This is my kind of prayer.) :

“Dearest Jesus: I am very sorry for my sins. I will be better. Am I getting my wish?”

Isn’t that great? Isn’t that a great prayer? Three simple sentences!

“The people in the next apartment fight real loud all the time. You should only let very good friends get married. But, if they fight, let them be friends again. -Nancy”

This is still on the original manuscript. Missy was eight.

“I am eight years old. How old are you? I like it down here. Do you like it up there?”

When it rains down here, I hate it down here. I love you. Missy”

Now this was written, and I hope I don't embarrass anybody today, it was put in my mailbox. It was written by a little kid, evidently, who goes to a school here. And it was faxed or something, but it is in the kid's script and it's a poem to Our Lady. The initials of the kid are J.B. and it was within the past few years. It's a poem.

“Holy Mary, Jesus is your little boy, like my mom to me. You brought Jesus such great joy. When we pray to you, you have an answer. So, right now, I pray for my aunt who has cancer. She is about to die and enter God's gate. But I won't be sad because everyone has the same fate. Your answer may be yes, not yet, or you have something better planned. I don't care which one, just hold my aunt's hand.”

This kid later came to Lourdes and he helped in the Drama Club, pulling the curtain for the plays and stuff. When he was a little kid, he wrote,

“Dear God, This is Herbie. Count me in! Why did you make so many people, Jesus? Could maybe you make another earth and put the extras there?”

Now, this I read every year. Gene was only six. I have to put this on an index card soon.

“Dear God, Why do you make bad people. My baby brother is very bad. I always have to spank him when Mommy ain't looking. Please make him good. If not, more spanking. I love you. -Gene” (who sounds lethal to me!)

Raymond, short and sweet.

“Dear God, I got left back. Thanks a lot!”

See, you can get mad at God in prayer. At least we're talking to him.

“My teacher says the North Pole is not really in the north. Did you make any other mistakes?”

This is a repeat, and I guess I'm afraid we'll have to keep repeating this every year we're together. Sandy was only seven.

“I think you should go on TV, God, and straighten things up. The faces and voices are sad and lots of shooting and stuff. Tell 'em off! Be tough! They say you love us all but I think most of them will be good and scared if you get tough! Channel 2 would be good, or 4.”

OK, just a few more.... Now, this is theology. This little kid, Stacey, later came to the high school when she grew up to be a freshman in high school. But she was seven, and this is the six years of theology. This is Aquinas and Augustine and Teilhard de Chardin and everybody else with brains in theological writings.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I thank you for all the things you have done for me. I thank you because you have gave me a heart. I thank you because you have gave me a brian” (brain) ...” and now I can love and learn. I am seven.” That’s all of the theology Father and I studied! “You have gave me a heart and a ‘brian,’ to love and to learn. I am seven. - Stacey” She’s got kids of her own now.

“I do thank you for my baby brother, but what I asked for was a puppy!”

This is a repeat...

“My father can never get a fire started, God. Could you make a burning bush in our yard?”

Of course, I pick the ones that are lighter in tone. I end every year with this one because it is every year applicable everywhere in the Catholic Church.

“Dear God, I like going to the Church on Sunday. I really do, BUT the priest talks too long!”