

Homily for the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Mass

Association for Catholic Childhood

St. Bridget's Church

November 5, 2008

It's a privilege and a joy to be with you for this Mass today. I'm a big fan of the ACC and have been for a long time. I came by it honestly: the ACC was one of the loves of my mother's life and, happily, it rubbed off on me! Whenever we come to your calendar season, I think of my Mom with her small army of recruits from the Mary Draham Circle putting on their annual 'full court press' at St. James. They took over every possible door of the Cathedral one Sunday each year and made sure that no one – and I mean no one! – got away that Sunday without a Catholic Childhood calendar in hand. Those people didn't have a chance!

If I correctly understand the 'walking papers' I got from Mary Welch, today's event is centered on two things: it's an opportunity to remember with gratitude and prayer all those wonderful members of the Association who have gone home to God. And it's also an opportunity to celebrate the ACC itself – what it is and what it stands for, what it accomplishes in our community. I can't think of two better things to do this morning.

I'm going to ask you to think of the readings we just heard – from Second Corinthians and from Mark's gospel – as a kind of mirror. If you look into the mirror of those scriptures, you'll see an image that looks very much like you, an image that very much resembles the ACC and what it's all about. I say that because in those scriptures – in that mirror – are the two things that define the Association for Catholic Childhood. What are they? Two things: giving and children. Let me say a word about both.

You know all about giving. That's what you do day after day in this great organization. You give your time, you give your care, you give your talents, you give your money. And you do it with a smile. Most of the time, anyway! And

in so doing, you are following St. Paul's advice to the Corinthians: you are "giving cheerfully, you are "sowing bountifully." And you can take a lot of comfort and encouragement from that because, as St. Paul puts it, "*God loves a cheerful giver.*" In my book, that's another way of saying that God loves you!

But it goes even deeper than that because in your generous, cheerful giving you yourselves become living and very believable images of the God who is love. God's love shines through you in wonderful ways, ways it never could were it not for you. God finds in you something like what he found in Jesus: God finds in you a human face to reveal his own face, human hands to touch and heal and embrace, a human heart to show his love. It's true, my friends. I'm not flattering you; I'm telling the truth. God becomes visible and tangible to others – especially to poor and needy people and families -- through you and your love. That's the first thing I want to say. You are a lot more than just 'do-gooders.' You are the face, the hands, the heart of God for all the children you love and support.

The other thing I want to say has to do with the gospel reading we heard. Jesus reminds us that true greatness doesn't come from power plays, from throwing our weight around or controlling other people; no, true greatness comes from becoming the last instead of the first, becoming like a little child. Leave it to Jesus to turn things upside-down.

But he's right and you know it. And there's even more here. We think of children as being on the receiving end, and they are. We teach them everything they know. We must. But children are also on the giving end. We teach them but they also teach us. They teach us how we are supposed to be in our relationship to God. They teach us how to be little, how to be dependent, how to be trusting. Who would ever think that kids have something to teach us? But they do. They really do. It's a two-way street.

Through your involvement in the ACC you're doing some wonderful things for children. That goes without saying. But they are doing something for

you, too, even if you never meet them or see them. In their dependence on you and your generosity, they are teaching you how you are supposed to be when it comes to your relationship with God. They are teaching you to trust – to trust in God even when things get stressful and difficult. They are teaching you to rest quietly and comfortably in God’s arms even as they, in a sense, rest in yours.

As we continue with the celebration of this Mass, we come very close in the Eucharist to the generous God who calls us to be generous givers, and we come very close to all the wonderful deceased members of this organization who are now with God but who, from their place with God, are, I’m sure, still very interested in what you in the ACC are doing. They are still part of this great family. In the Communion of Saints they are cheering you on and praying for the success of everything you do. I hope you feel their presence not only today but in the days to come as you continue your great work!

Father Michael G. Ryan