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Saint Bernard Church
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THE POWER OF GOD'S CHILDREN

Who is the hero in today's Gospel?

Certainly not the apostles, who had been arguing about who among them was the greatest.

No, it's the child. The child who is not named. The child who does nothing. The child who says nothing.

Jesus delights in the child simply because the child exists.

And the child is the hero in the story because he lets Jesus love him. He lets Jesus put His arms around him. He's willing to let Jesus do whatever He wants with him.

When Jesus says, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me," He is identifying Himself with the child.

This raises the question, "What do Jesus and the child have in common?"

They're both humble. They reject self-reliance and achievement in favor of renouncing themselves and being fully responsive to God's will.

Jesus uses the child to remind the apostles that none of them were chosen by Jesus because of their achievements. The child, like the apostles in the beginning, just allowed himself to become the center of Jesus' attention, the center of His life.

Today's Gospel calls each of us to ask the following question: Has my desire for achievement in my life obstructed my willingness to trust Jesus and obey God's will for me?

Some years ago, at a retreat for Catholic men, I met a man in his late 30's who was at that time a member at Saint Bernard's. I think his last name was Silinski.

This man told me during a break in the retreat that for many years he had pushed God aside and focused on getting ahead in his career. But then, on a visit to his parents at the home he was raised in, he came across a recording of his Catholic grade school class singing some church hymns.

Listening to the sweet, innocent voices made him reflect on all the roadblocks he had put in his relationship with God in his desire to get ahead in life.

There's a tradeoff, a paradox, when it comes to our spiritual life. We can gain access to earthly power and influence through our achievements in our secular life.

But if we want access to God's power and grace in our spiritual life, that comes from humility and surrender.

At the beginning of the Gospel of John, the author writes, "To those who did accept Jesus, He gave power to become children of God."

We don't typically associate spiritual power and childhood, but that's the way it works in the life Jesus makes available to us. As God told Saint Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The power in Jesus' life came from His accepting his role as a child and wanting to do only what His Father wanted Him to do.

Our primary task then, as followers of Christ, is to claim our identity as children of the Father and seek to do only what the Father wants us to do. We are to acknowledge our weakness and our total dependence on Him.

When we do so, we will experience a power and a grace that could only come from God.

God delighted in Jesus, saying "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased."

And God delights in us as well, inviting us to share in His love.

The goal is for our attitude to go from "Look what I've done" to "Look what God has done through me."