

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

While I was doing some background reading for today's homily I came across a bit of information that stopped me cold.

I thought I was one of only a few people in the world who, in their childhood, ever wondered "What I would be like if I had different parents?"

Turns out, almost every child entertains that question at some time or another. So much for thinking of myself as a genius.

What's going on with that question is the realization on the part of a young person that, even though it can be hard to put it to words, he/she is more than the accidents of their birth. There's more to me than the particular outer forms of mind and body that my "I-ness" animates.

Every child seems to sense that he or she would still be "I" even if he or she had different parents and a different body.

The child knows he or she would look different and act differently, but he or she would still be an "I," would still have self-awareness.

The child asks the question because he or she wants the parents to explain his/her "transcendence," the fact that there is something about her that "goes beyond."

Why do we forget about this as we get older? Maybe because we didn't have anyone with whom

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to talk about the question when it preoccupied our minds.

Or our awareness of this inner reality might have become so weak that, when our kids are pondering the mystery, we feel totally ill equipped to engage the topic.

I think Jesus was making that sort of point when he put a child in the midst of the disciples as an example of where the true importance of our human living lies.

It's not about importance as we often count importance, because the most important thing about us is already a given—we have a part of us that matches up with nothing else in this world, only God.

In the first reading this part that matches is behind Adam's exclamation "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;" He found in Eve a person who also shared in that transcendent quality of being made in the image and likeness of God.

This quality of our being is not something that happens when we reach a certain age, like the age to vote, or, in Jesus' day, when you celebrated your bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah and came under then law.

It's built in from the beginning. It's how we were made in the image and likeness of God. Each of us, in our own I-ness, our own individuality and

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irreplaceability.

I was doing some prep work with the middle-school kids about the children's liturgy this Sunday and we looked at the Gospel, especially the last part. I asked them what they thought was important to bring out from the readings—what everyone should hear. One answer had to do with respect. Kids hear often that they need to respect their elders—and they do.

But there is a kind of respect due to anyone who has that God-given I-ness, that awareness that I am not just the sum of all the conditions of my living. There is something that transcends all that which can come only from God.

That's worth honoring. That's worth acknowledging as something really awesome. And it's not something that's going anywhere. It's a permanent aspect of who we are and gives us infinite dignity, regardless of age.

So, let's hear it for the wisdom and experience of those who are older. And let's hear it for the freshness and willingness of the young to question and ponder and be astounded.

We have so much to offer one another, and those gifts can be shared best when we avoid forgetting about their value and where they all have come from and the goal to which they drive us which is God alone.