

Research Seminar Days
With Professor Carla Rinaldi

Prayer Day 1

Gathering

Joy at the promised birth of a child is one of the deepest songlines of our Gospels. When the angel announced to the unexpected Zechariah the birth of his son, John, (Luke 1:11-19) the angel reassured him, 'Do not be afraid... ¹⁴ He will be **a joy** and delight to you, and many will **rejoice** because of his birth'.⁴¹ At the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), the angel reassured a humble and afraid Mary, again **with the promise of joy** - that the child she carried would 'cause **great joy for all the people**'. When Mary, after the annunciation, visited Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45), the baby John leaped **for joy** in his mother's womb (44). And Mary sang her 'rejoice' for the imminence of her child Jesus (Luke 1:46-56). It is no wonder that Pope Francis tells us that 'Every child who is born is a gift of joy and of hope...' (12/01/2014)

So as we spend time together re-imagining childhood, what we try to capture is the image of joy and hope: the image of the child. For us the primary expression of that image is too found in the Scriptures; 'We are made in the image of God' *Genesis 1:27*. An image that seems, at first, the most elusive of abstractions to understand ourselves. For God is ***all and infinite***. But the scripture challenges us to look to ourselves, and to one another, to see all that God is: God the generator of creativity, of imagination, of knowledge and truth. Of all that is good. A child is **all that God is** from the moment of conception; and not yet limited by the burden of limitation, disappointment, cynicism, and moral conflict. The child is the closest image of God we have: only full of potential, creative possibility, 'joy and hope'.

Every child, a unique human being, - 'engraved on the palms of GOD's hands' (Isaiah 49:16) - 'a sign of the love of the Creator who entrusts us with the mystery of a new person (Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (Light of Faith), 52)

A person invested with human dignity and a desire for meaning and for life.

Children find this life, and are loved into being, in location. This may be an Italian village. It maybe Nazareth, a village in the province of Galilee. The location maybe the Church or, as Christians are called be, in the world. But where-ever they are located, they are formed through

‘participation and inclusion’(Mercer, 2005). They are from childhood ‘disciples, agents and [citizens]...[to] be taken seriously’ (Mercer, 2005). And if we are ‘...to offer them the possibility of living a dignified life and of actively participating in the common good’ these locations must be imbued by an ‘ethical vision of activities and of human relationships’ that recognise the ‘centrality of human dignity’ (Pope Francis, in part citing Benedict XVI, 5/25/13).

So this is location and pedagogy: where we are and how we are with our children. Exodus (3:5), Pope Francis tells us, teaches us that ‘the “art of accompaniment” is to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (Evangelii Gaudium 169). He calls too on the metaphor of Church as mother who brings about in her children **all that God is** by **listen[ing]** to their concerns and **learn[ing] from** them. The spirit of love, Francis writes, ‘...guides mother and child in their conversations; therein **together** they **teach and learn**, experience...and grow in appreciation of what is good.’ (Evangelii Gaudium 139). Pope Francis might be understood to advocate a ‘pedagogy of listening’, when he encourages,

‘We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening...is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur’ (Evangelii Gaudium 170).

Encounters, so often brought to us by children, that allow us to experience God’s Grace, moments of wonder and mystery that break unexpectedly into our day, when we see, through the eyes of a child, the ant, the shadow, the web and the raindrop anew.

When we are with our children and with one another, ‘[l]istening helps us to find the right gesture and word that shows that we are more than merely bystanders’ (Evangelii Gaudium, 170), but fully present and full participants in hope and joy.

Prayer written and prepared by Elizabeth Dickinson, for Catholic Education SA on the occasion of the visit of *Professor Carla Rinaldi* July-August 2014

Come. my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD (Psalm 34:10-12)

Reading: Luke 10: 1-3, 16, 17-21

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two^[a] others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ² He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

¹⁶ “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with **joy** and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

¹⁸ He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

²⁰ However, **do not rejoice** that the spirits submit to you, but **rejoice** that your names are written in heaven.”

²¹ At that time Jesus, **full of joy** through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

Reader: The Word of the LORD

Response: Thanks be to GOD

Play Reflection

References

<http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-every-baptized-child-is-a-miracle-of-12/01.14>

[http://globalfellows.crs.org/resources/selected-quotes-of-pope-francis/\(5/25/13\)](http://globalfellows.crs.org/resources/selected-quotes-of-pope-francis/(5/25/13))