# Lesson 19 Matthew Chapter 18 Little Ones

Life in Christ: When did you feel closest to Our Lord this week?

1. A. While the Apostles wrestle with greatness in worldly terms, Jesus upends that conception of greatness, replacing it with a new definition. Jesus demonstrates greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven at the Last Supper (John 13:2-7, 12-15). What is the true measure of greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven? See Matthew 23:11-12.

Matthew 18:1-5

1 At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

2 He called a child over, placed it in their midst,

3 and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.

Matthew 23:11-12

11 The greatest among you must be your servant.

12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

John 13:2-7, 12-15

2 So, during supper,

3 fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

4 he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist.

5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Master, are you going to wash my feet?”

7 Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later.”

12 So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you?

13 You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am.

14 If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.

15 I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do

B In vs John 13:13, Jesus dramatically points out who He is to emphasize our obligation to service and love. Who does Jesus say He is? See also vs 3.

C In Matthew 18:1-5, Jesus mentions a child or children four times. He is not talking about children. Who is He really talking about?

1. A. In vs 6, “little ones” refers to the same people in the answer to part C of the previous question. What is the sin Jesus refers to that is so egregious as to require such a dire punishment? Matthew 5:19 from the Sermon on the Mount gives a hint. This same quotation is repeated in all three Synoptic Gospels and may be alluded to in St. John’s Book of Revelation where Babylon is symbolic of Jerusalem, in general, and the religious establishment in particular.

Matthew 18:6-7, (Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2)

6 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

7 Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come!

Matthew 5:19

19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Revelation 18:21-22

21 A mighty angel picked up a stone like a huge millstone and threw it into the sea and said: "With such force will Babylon the great city be thrown down, and will never be found again.

22 No melodies of harpists and musicians, flutists and trumpeters, will ever be heard in you again. No craftsmen in any trade will ever be found in you again. No sound of the millstone will ever be heard in you again.

B What are some examples of where we see this sin in the world around us today?

C We sometimes think of death as the ultimate human tragedy; it is not. Far more serious in an eternal sense are the loss of faith and a rejection of God and His Grace. How does the sin of Matthew 18:6-7 relate to this? Consider Catechism 1033.

Catechism 1033

1033 To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell.”

1. A. Continuing the discussion about “these little ones,” Jesus speaks of an angel looking over each believer personally. It is from this passage that the Church received its teaching about a particular class of angels dedicated to each believer. What do we call these angels?

Matthew 18:10

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.

Catechism 336

336 From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

B In Jesus’ discussion of these “little ones,” He speaks of one who has strayed? Since we are not speaking of sheep, Luke’s Gospel may clarify the discussion. What do these passages tell us about God and the Church Triumphant about the salvation of each individual soul?

Matthew 18:12-14

12 What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray?

13 And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray.

14 In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.

Luke 15:10

7 I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

10 In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

C What do these passages tell us about the awareness of the Church Triumphant and the angels about our activities in this life? What do your loved ones who have died know about what you are doing and how do they react when you repent?

1. In chapter 20, the issue of greatness again arises. In answer to the disciples question in Matthew 18:1, Jesus answers the question with the example of a little child. In Matthew 20:27, He answers explicitly. Remembering that the Kingdom of heaven means both the Kingdom of God in heaven and the Kingdom of God on earth – the Church, What counts for greatness in God’s eyes? To put the exclamation point on it, see Matthew 20:28.

Matthew 18:1-5

1 At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Matthew 20:20

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something.

21 He said to her, “What do you wish?” She answered him, “Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom.”

22 Jesus said in reply, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?” They said to him, “We can.”

23 He replied, “My cup you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left [, this] is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

24 When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers.

25 But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt.

26 But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant;

27 whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.

28 Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”