

HOMILY

The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time *September 20, 2009*

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Davison, Michigan

Once there was a very prosperous farmer who invited an old school friend to spend a week-end on his farm. They walked all over the place looking at the lush crops about to be harvested and especially at the great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. The friend had seen sheep from the flock exhibited at state and county fairs. They seemed to win all the prizes. He said to his farmer friend, "I've never seen finer sheep. How do you do it?"

The farmer answered, "They are fine sheep because I take care of my lambs."

That's a striking statement. The farmer took care of his lambs; therefore, he had prize-winning sheep.

Taking a child, Jesus placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me...." Children. Kids. Munchkins. Rug Rats. Ya gotta love 'em. Jesus obviously did.

Several years ago, a couple of books were published entitled CHILDREN'S LETTERS TO GOD and MORE CHILDREN'S LETTERS TO GOD, which collected some rather clever letters from youngsters to the Almighty.

Dear God,
Is it true my father won't go to heaven if he uses his
bowling words in the house? Anita

Dear God,
Thank you for my baby brother. But what I prayed for
was a puppy. Joyce

Dear God,

I bet it is very hard for you to love everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it! Nan

Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.

I would like to be able to report that the condition of children in this world has significantly improved since Jesus' time. But the plight of children is not the best. Even though the number of abortions in Michigan is declining, each day hundreds of innocent lives are still snuffed out by abortions.

The picture of child abuse and neglect is also very harrowing. We have estimates that 35,000 children under the age of five die daily around the globe, mostly from preventable poverty conditions. The financial cost to end most of these child deaths is about \$2.5 billion a year, which is the amount that Americans spend on chewing gum.

Like the farmer who had the finest of sheep because he especially took care of his lambs, it is important for us to ask, "How are we taking care of our lambs?"

One of the many blessings that we enjoy as a parish is the gift of many children. We have over 1,800 children and youth. I am always thrilled when families with children join us for Liturgy. This is what family is all about. Parents need to take the leadership in bringing their children to the Lord. I encourage families with children to sit up closer to the front—there's so much to see. It's my custom to invite children to the altar—many of them have their eyes fixed on what's happening and can repeat word for word the prayer that the priest offers.

For children who need some extra space, starting today we offer Eagle's Nest on Sunday mornings. And starting the week of October 5, Eagle's Nest will be open Mondays through Thursdays in the Family Center. When a child is placed at the Eagle's Nest, their parent is given a pager so if their presence is required, they're just a pager away.

Perhaps one of the best kept secrets is that our parish offers two excellent pre-school programs for our youngest members: Catholic Montessori and Child Development. Now in its eighth year, St. John pre-schools offer classes in the

mornings and afternoons and are offering a brand new class for Early Fives. When it comes to the big picture, those first years are so vital to the rest of the journey.

I like what Robert Fulghum said: “Most of what I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sand pile at nursery school.” Think of what a better world it would be if the whole world had cookies and milk around three o’clock every afternoon and then laid down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy for our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and clean up our own messes. It is still true not matter how old you are when you get out into the world. It is best to hold hands and stick together.

Along with early childhood development, our parish offers religious education and faith formation starting with three-year-olds, continuing with elementary school, middle school, and high school. You won’t find any better dedicated staff and corps of teachers and team members in sharing faith with our children and you. In addition to offering P.R.E.P. on Mondays and Tuesdays, we’re piloting a new program offering P.R.E.P. right at Davison Middle School for our middle school students immediately after classes. We’ll meet on Mondays at Hahn right after class and have a brand new format that I am excited about! We are in need of team members for this pilot program, so please speak to Paul Schlegelmilch.

Registration is taking place today. Remember the farmer who had prize-winning sheep? He took care of his lambs and in caring for them, had the best. I invite you to join me in caring for our lambs in bringing them to Jesus.

