**Children Belong with Jesus (Matthew 19:13-15)**

 Both children and we adults need to devote ourselves to Jesus. Greetings to you dear brothers and sisters, as we speak today about the topic of our most sensitive members of our community, our children. The Lord Jesus considered children highly important; we as well, in establishing today’s theme for worship, are declaring that our children also (along with us adults) have a place in church, especially as co-believers with us in Christ. Turning to the episode from the Scripture, we see that it happens while Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and as he prepares himself for the high holidays to bring his teaching and God’s power to the capital city of the kingdom. People, most likely parents, were bringing children to Jesus for him to lay hands on them. The apostles hindered those efforts, and suddenly we have an interesting picture: Jesus’ enemies, for that moment, were his own disciples! Jesus, however, puts them in their place with one sentence and once again establishes that children belong to the kingdom of God. After saying so, he blesses them and continues on toward Jerusalem. Taking our cues from this passage, today we’re going to speak about the importance of children as well as how we ought to be like them (in some respects). Both children and we adults need to devote ourselves to Jesus. (Let us move, then, to our analysis…)

 As adults, we ought to present children to Jesus and cultivate their good qualities within ourselves as followers of the Lord. It is accepted in history that Jewish parents often brought their children to teachers and Rabbis, especially on the Day of Atonement once a year. Most probably, in this case as well, those parents had the same goal. Laying on of hands was a normal manner of blessing in those days. It was used by parents to bless children. It was used to ordain a leader, to present an offering, (and especially in the New Testament) to heal someone, or to transmit the power of the Holy Spirit.

 Knowing this, it is also important to realize that children themselves were (and still are) examples because of their helpless and vulnerable state. Children are completely dependent on the adults that surround them. During their whole life, a child is expected to be subject to and obedient to the parents or adults older than him. It was also expected that they care for their parents once they were no longer able to do so themselves… Due to their age, children were marginal members of society. Sometimes they were even viewed as dangerous to the established order. They were viewed as totally in a state of transition to adulthood. At the same time, within Jewish families, “little ones” were given more and more affection, care and value; parents more and more viewed them as gifts from God. There was more respect towards them and their value by Jesus’ time period.

 Coleridge was once talking with a man who told him that he did not believe in giving little children any religious instruction whatsoever. His theory was that the child's mind should not be prejudiced in any direction, but when he came to years of discretion, he should be permitted to choose his religious opinions for himself. Coleridge said nothing; but after a while he asked his visitor if he would like to see his garden. The man said he would, and Coleridge took him out into the garden, where only weeds were growing. The man looked at Coleridge in surprise, and said, "Why this is not a garden! There is nothing but weeds here!"

"Well, you see," answered Coleridge, "I did not wish to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way. I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself and to choose its own production."

 Today, dearly beloved, we also are not only called to guide our children, our little ones onto the path of the Lord, but also to take upon ourselves those Godly qualities that they possess inherently by their position in society and life. Just as children are in transition until they are adults, we as disciples of Jesus must always be his students in transition until the Second Coming of Christ. Just as children are dependent upon their parents until adulthood, we also, all the more, are called to always be dependent upon our Heavenly Father. Just as children were brought to Jesus as marginal members of society, without power or security and always vulnerable, we also, to follow Jesus (well), must allow him to be in the center of our lives, as we stay in the margins. In addition, we are called to put aside our personal human strength, security and source of protection and come to Jesus for all those things.

 Therefore, come and let us make a decision together to do our best to raise our children in the ways of the Lord. Come and let us always be dependent and leaning upon Jesus, who provides our every need. As adults, we ought to present children to Jesus and cultivate their good qualities within ourselves as followers of the Lord. Both children and we adults need to devote ourselves to Jesus. The Lord bless you. Amen.