



**A**T the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.* (Matthew 18:1-14)

### The Collect

*Holy Innocents*

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### Christmas Day

*(to be said daily throughout the Octave)*

**A**LMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

I have often said that I have yet to ask a child of four years age if he believed in God and receive a response that he did not. Children come with an innate faith of God and His love. As we grow older, so grows the sin and doubts of our hearts. We might expect the reading for today to recount the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem by Herod's soldiers as prophesied by the prophets (Jer 31:15-17), but instead we are fed with the very Bread of heaven regarding the status and faith of little children.

The eighth Psalm is included for the daily psalter. There is a strong testimony associated with this Psalm in the scientific discoveries of Matthew Fontaine Maury, founder of the US Naval Observatory in Washington, DC and progenitor of the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. He was known, in the days of my youth, as the Pathfinder of the Seas, but owing to his frequent reference to the Hand of God in his discoveries, his name and contribution are hidden from the eyes of youthful scholars. (The mention of God's name could, presumably, do irreparable damage to their little minds). In the early to mid-1800's, Maury discovered the tropical streams and found ways of saving tremendous amounts of time in traversing the sea by sailing vessels. His computations are acknowledged today by Naval Navigation charts whose subtitles state, "As computed by Matthew Fontaine Maury."

How did Maury become the Father of Oceanography and Naval Meteorology. Once when recovering from a bout of flu, Maury was listening as his son read from the eighth Psalm (today's reading). When his son read the line, *The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea; \* and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas*, Maury asked him to repeat those lines. He then commented, "If God says there are paths in the sea, I am going to find them!" and he DID! All of his scientific works detail the mystery of God's leading Hand in all natural science.

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? This question presupposed that one of the apostles, or some great personage, would be identified. But the thoughts of God are not the thoughts of man.

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. The child is likely shy in the company of so many adults, yet the child will come and stand in the midst with total trust in Christ. Children have an instinct that informs of a good and loving character. With our conversion should come a gradual return to that childlike trust and faith we had as children. Not that we should become childish, but possess the better part of a childlike nature. We must become like that little child in order to enter in to the Kingdom of Heaven. If carefully tended and protected as a prized rose, a child will grow into a good and faithful Christian. If left among the thorns, the concerns of the world will choke his spirit and he will die an early spiritual death.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. Have you ever received a little child in Christ's name? Have you ever stooped down to their level and blessed them and told them how much they are loved by our Lord? Have you given a hand, for the sake and love of Christ, to one of these bruised little ones? Have you dared wash a tear-stained and dirty face and given a refreshing drink or a morsel of bread? Would Christ have done? If we act in His Name we must act as He would act.

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. It is my understanding that millstones are quite cumbersome and impossible for the best swimmer, so burdened, to keep afloat in the sea. Such is the fate of those who would offend or abuse one of these little ones. To offend one such child is tantamount to causing a child to stumble in the path of life, ensnaring them by temptations and dissolute living so that they are caught in the snares and bondage of

sin and Satan. Those trafficking rings today who sell little children into the most filthy circumstances of sex and sin will have more than a millstone for a collar. They deserve far worse than our minds can imagine.

*Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!* For those misguided theologians who argue that Judas was forgiven simply because he had no choice but to betray Christ will need to consider this verse and the following: *He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.* (Matt 26:23-24) The unregenerate, which we all were until drawn to Christ, have already earned their places in Hell, but think of the hotter fires that await such a one as Judas. It is certain that evil days will always come upon the earth, but those by whom evil is worked are due greater punishment. Please read Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God" just as a refreshment to memory.

*Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.* Perhaps we might recall the testimony of Archbishop Cranmer, the leading light of the English Reformation, who doubtlessly knew this comment of Christ. Thomas Cranmer, having recanted to save his life, afterward stood valiantly for the truth and was burned a martyr. While at the burning stake, Archbishop Cranmer held out his hand into the flames saying, "This hand has offended; this unworthy hand!" He thereby allowed the offending hand to feel the flames first. We further see in the words of Christ just mentioned the continuing evidence of an eternal punishment for sinners by fire.

*And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.* The eye is the window to the soul. If our vision is not single, we may be led into the most decadent of lives. It is far better to be deprived of an eye, or an arm, or a leg than to suffer the eternal pains of fire.

*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* Perhaps if we knew that the angels of children are always in Communion with God the Father so that no act or treatment escapes His notice, we might be more observant of our responsibility, not only to avoid offending a child, but to do all in our power to promote and nurture their faith and happiness.

*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.* As are all children, the young lambs are most rambunctious and apt to roam from the flock. Their vision is quite short-sighted. They see clumps of grass out of the beaten path and go for it. After a bit of wandering they look about and find no other sheep or shepherd around them. They wander in the rocks and crevasses of the mountains in desperate search of their shepherd. Instinctively, they are aware of their grave danger from wolves and other predators. The Good Shepherd cannot abide the loss of a single lamb. He will leave the ninety and nine in safe shelter while He roams the hills and hollows in search of His one lost lamb. Can you see from this how important a little child is to Jesus? The lamb, alone and defenseless, begins to bleat in desperation. By and by, the Shepherd hears His chosen little lamb praying by the rocky cliff and goes immediately to its rescue. He returns bearing the lamb in His arms (next to His great heart). JF Miller, in Westminster Teacher, tells the story of a

great piece of marble that was marred and cast aside. He tells us that “even in the ruins of a soul there are divine elements, and so long as even a fragment remains God wants to give it still another chance.” In Florence, one of the treasures of art admired by thousands of visitors is Michael Angelo’s representation in marble of young David. It is, indeed, a marvelous piece of sculpture. But the strangely winning thing in the story of that statue is that it was the stone’s second chance. A sculptor began work on a noble piece of marble, but, lacking skill, he only hacked and marred the block. It was then abandoned as worthless and cast aside. For years it lay in a backyard, half hidden among the rubbish. Then Michaelangelo found it and transformed it into his beautiful masterpiece. God does the same with us, doesn’t He?

*Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.* I have heard, too many times, that “it was the will of God” that such and such happened to a family or a child as a result of the sinful heart of some human monster. Is it correct to presume that any sin occurs by the Will of God? It is NOT! There are terrible fates that befall countless children (and adults) every day under the sun. These are not by the Will of God, but the so-called free will of men. Little children will not suffer pain and hurt at the hands of a committed Christian because their wills conform to the will of God and are not free in the sense that they can sin with intent. Do not ever consider that any child will perish by the will of God. And here is another delightful mystery: we are all children in the eyes of God. Are you a child of God, or some other?