

# 天主教學校教師日 2019

主題：「讓小孩子到我跟前來！」

## 主題闡釋及反省（一）

問：今年天主教學校教師日的主題是：「讓小孩子到我跟前來」（谷 10:14）。那個「我」可怎樣詮釋？

答：主題中的「我」，可以作為兩個不同的理解。其中一個解說當然是指耶穌基督，因為這是直接引用了耶穌在福音中的一句說話：「讓小孩子到我跟前來！」（谷 10:14）。另一個解說是指在天主教學校服務的每一位教育工作者，他們以言以行具體地彰顯耶穌基督的表率。

問：為什麼要讓小孩子走近耶穌基督？

答：耶穌基督是天主教學校整個教育事業的根基。基督提昇了人性，給人類生命賦與意義，成為天主教學校推薦給學生的楷模。因此，天主教學校的學生應走近並認識耶穌基督，好讓他們藉著福音的光照，能把課程中獲得的知識融會貫通，促進他們的人格發展，同時亦能逐步培養他們的良知，並透過修鍊養成基本而恒久的德行。

問：那麼，你能告訴我耶穌是誰？祂與我的生命有何相干？

答：若望福音具體地給我們介紹了耶穌基督：

1. 「我就是**生命的食糧**；到我這裡來的，永不會饑餓；信從我的，總不會渴。」（若 6:35）
2. 「我是**世界的光**；跟隨我的，決不在黑暗中行走，必有生命的光。」（若 8:12）
3. 「我就是**門**，誰若經過我進來，必得安全；可以進，可以出，可以找著草場。我來，是為叫他們獲得生命，且獲得更豐富的生命。」（若 10:9,10）
4. 「我是**善牧**：善牧為羊捨掉自己的性命。我是善牧，我認識我的羊，我的羊也認識我；我並且為羊捨掉我的性命。」（若 10:11,14,15）
5. 「我就是**復活**，就是生命；凡活著而信從我的人，必永遠不死。」（若 11:25,26）
6. 「我是**道路、真理、生命**，除非經過我，誰也不能到父那裡去。」（若 14:6）
7. 「我是**葡萄樹**，你們是枝條；那住在我內，我也住在他內的，他就結許多的果實。」（若 15:5）

問：既然耶穌為人的生命是如此重要，為何有人阻止小孩子到他跟前？

答：在耶穌時代，門徒曾經阻止群眾帶小孩子來見耶穌。耶穌的門徒可能出於一番好意，眼見耶穌如此忙碌，連吃飯、休息及睡覺的時間都沒有，小孩子既然聽不明白耶穌的道理，還要耶穌逐一撫摸、祝福他們，只會令耶穌更忙碌。

問：身為今日的天主教學校教育工作者，我有沒有阻止小孩子找到耶穌基督？

答：今日的天主教學校，是讓小孩子找到耶穌基督的福地，因為我們按照天主教學校的願景及使命辦學。透過宗教倫理科、祈禱、禮儀及信仰小團體，我們讓學生找到耶穌。不過，值得我們反省的是：

- 我們有沒有營造真正的宗教氛圍，吸引學生走近耶穌？
- 我們有沒有在教授學科知識時，融合福音的價值，讓學生更易認識並接受耶穌？
- 我們有沒有鼓勵學生參與宗教聚會、禮儀及相關活動，使他們獲得與耶穌相遇的經驗？
- 我們會否偏重學生的學科成績或在技能上的成就，而忽略了他們的人格發展和靈性修養？
- 我們會否認為宗教教育只是傳遞「信則有、不信則無」的相關知識，因而在無意間輕視宗教教育，或將該科邊緣化？
- 「天主教學校的工作基本上是文化與信仰的結合，以及信仰與生活的結合。」作為天主教學校的教師，這句話對我們有甚麼特別的意義？
- 我的同事之中，並非人人都是基督的信徒，但
  - (a) 我身為信徒，有沒有在生活中活出信仰，並協助其他的同事，把耶穌基督帶進日常的教學工作和校園生活中？ 或
  - (b) 我雖然不是信徒，但我有沒有實踐我在天主教學校服務的承諾，設法認識和堅守天主教學校教育的核心理念，把基督福音所薰陶的真理、公義、愛德，生命和家庭等價值，以及真福八端的精神，奉為校園生活的規範，並適切地呈現在學生面前？

問：主題中「我」的第二個解說，對我們教育工作者又有什麼意義呢？

答：耶穌基督邀請我們每一個教育工作者延續他的使命，參與他的工作，作羊群的善牧。祂教導我們，善牧要親自牧放自己的羊：「失落的，我要尋找；迷路的，我要領回；受傷的，我要包紮；病弱的，我要療養；肥胖和強壯的，我要看守；我要按正義牧放他們。」(則 34:16)

讓我們想想：

- 我們真的認識我們所教的學生嗎？
- 我們有沒有以善牧的心腸，去接觸、聆聽、陪伴、照顧、引導和發展我們的學生呢？
- 我們有沒有善待有不同需要的學生，例如：迷路的、受傷的、病弱的、憂傷的，甚至聰明的、能幹的學生？
- 我們有否因長期的工作，而忘掉了在天主教學校從事教育的「初衷」呢？
- 我的同事之中，並非人人都是基督的信徒，但
  - (a) 我身為信徒，有沒有憑仗信德、望德和愛德，關心和照顧每個學生，特別是那些貧窮的、被忽略的和受欺壓的學生，讓他們雖在困難當中，仍能體驗天主的慈愛，使他們可以重拾尊嚴和自信，設法做個相似基督的人？ 或
  - (b) 我雖然不是信徒，但我有沒有盡力給每個學生完整的「愛的教育」，使他們在困難中，仍能對生命抱持信心和希望？

# Catholic School Teachers' Day 2019

Theme: "Let the Children Come to Me!"

## Theme Interpretation and Reflection (1)

Q: The theme of Catholic School Teachers' Day 2019 is "Let the Children Come to Me" (Mark 10:14). To whom does "me" refer?

A: There are two ways of understanding this. The first one, of course, refers to Jesus Christ, since the saying, "Let the little children come to me;" (Mark 10:14), comes from Jesus in the Gospel. The second one refers to each educator in Catholic schools, who in both word and deed is to make the example of Jesus Christ known to all.

Q: Why should the children be allowed to get close to Jesus?

A: Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in every Catholic school. He is the One Who ennobles man, gives meaning to human life, and is the Model which every Catholic school offers to its students. Therefore Catholic school students should be encouraged to draw closer to Christ and get to know Him, so that they will be enlightened by His Gospel and be able to integrate various disciplines of knowledge learnt from the school subjects. In so doing, they may develop progressively their personalities and conscience, and through practice acquire fundamental virtues that are long-lasting.

Q: So, can you tell me who Jesus is? What does he have to do with my life?

A: The Gospel according to St. John specifically introduces Jesus Christ to us.

1. *I am the **bread of life**; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. (John 6:35)*
2. *I am the **light of the world**. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)*
3. *I am the **gate**. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:9, 10)*
4. *I am the **good shepherd**. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me; I will lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:11, 14, 15)*
5. *I am the **resurrection and the life**; everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25, 26)*
6. *I am **the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)*
7. *I am the **vine**, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit. (John 15:5)*

Q: Since Jesus is so important to our lives, why did people prevent children from approaching Him?

A: In the time of Jesus, the disciples prevented the crowds from bringing children to Jesus. The disciples of Jesus might have acted out of good intentions, for Jesus was obviously so busy, often not even stopping to eat, rest or sleep. They felt children might not be able to understand the truths that Jesus taught, and asking Him to touch and bless them one by one would only made Him busier.

Q: As an educator in a modern-day Catholic school, have you prevented children from finding Jesus?

A: Catholic schools today are blessed with great opportunity for seeking Jesus Christ and His blessing, for they are run according to the vision and mission of Catholic education. We lead students to find Jesus through Religious & Moral Education, prayers, liturgy and small communities of Catholic faith. However, the matters we should reflect on are as follows:

- *Have we created an authentic religious atmosphere to enable students to draw closer to Jesus?*
- *Are the Gospel values integrated with our teaching of subject knowledge, so as to help students know and accept Jesus?*
- *Do we encourage students to participate in religious gatherings, liturgy and related activities to enable them to experience their encounters with Jesus?*
- *Is there too much emphasis on students' academic results or skill-based achievements, and have we paid too little attention to their personality development and spiritual formation?*
- *Do we think that "religious education" is only supposed to deal with knowledge about something when the students believe it exists? Accordingly, do we inadvertently hold the subject in contempt, or allow it to be marginalised?*
- *"The work of a Catholic school is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life." Does this statement have any special meaning to me, as a teacher working in a Catholic school?*
- *Not all of my colleagues are Christian, but*
  - (a) *Have I, as a Christian, lived according to my faith, and helped my colleagues to bring out Jesus Christ in their teaching and school life? **OR***
  - (b) *Have I, though not a Christian, kept my promise that when working in a Catholic school, I would try hard to understand and uphold the core values of Catholic school education, and present to the students in an appropriate way as enlightened by the Gospel, such values as Truth, Justice, Love, Life and Family, as well as the spirit of the Beatitudes, while embracing them as the norms to be observed in everyday life of each school?*

Q: What is the significance of the second way of understanding "me" in the theme for this year?

A: Jesus Christ has invited each of our educators to continue His mission, to take part in His work, and to be a good shepherd of His flock. He teaches us that a good shepherd endeavours to tend his own flock, "The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, shepherding them rightly". (Ezekiel 34:16)

Let us think about it:

- *Do we know our students?*
- *Have we tuned our minds and hearts to those of our Good Shepherd so as to approach, listen to, accompany, care for, guide, and develop our students?*
- *Do we lovingly care for students who have different needs, e.g., the lost, the injured, the sick, the depressed, and even those gifted with diverse talents?*
- *Have we forgotten our "initial aspirations" to take up teaching in Catholic schools, after having been engaged as teachers for a long time?*
- *Not all of my colleagues are Christian, but*

- (a) *Have I, as a Christian, through the virtues of Faith, Hope and Love, ever taken care of every student, especially those who are poor, marginalized or oppressed, so that they may experience God's love even at difficult times, regain self-esteem and confidence, and strive to make themselves like Jesus Christ? **OR***
- (b) *Have I, though not a Christian, tried my utmost to offer every student an all-round education of love, so that they may remain confident and hopeful even at difficult times?*

2018年 教育日

## 讓小孩子到我跟前來 (谷 10:14)

有人給耶穌領來一些小孩子，要他撫摸他們；門徒卻斥責他們。耶穌見了，就生了氣，對他們說：「讓小孩子到我跟前來，不要阻止他們！因為天主的國正屬於這樣的人。我實在告訴你們：誰若不像小孩子一樣接受天主的國，決不能進去。」耶穌遂抱起他們來，給他們覆手，祝福了他們。(谷 10:13-16)

耶穌時代的希伯來文化，有別於希臘及羅馬文化，不會漠視兒童的地位。那時的猶太人已將兒童視為上主恩賜的珍貴禮物(創 30:20；創 33:5；撒下 1:18, 20；詠 127:3)；人們帶孩童給耶穌撫摸，亦屬恰當，而這傳統可追溯至雅各伯認孫為子的事跡，他用手按在孩童頭上祝福(創 48:9, 14)。

那麼為何門徒斥責帶小孩子前來的人呢？明顯地，門徒可能認為制止小孩子接近師傅，有助減輕祂的負擔，免祂勞累，因為祂每到一處，都擁擠著群眾，既請求祂驅魔、治病，又期望祂教化、啟導。要祂應付成年人的事務已很繁重，哪還有餘力應酬小孩子呢？畢竟他們只是微不足道的小子吧！

「耶穌見了，就生了氣……」根據福音記載，耶穌只有三次被他人的行為所觸怒，而這是其中的一次。祂的憤怒並非出於憎恨，而是為體現虔敬與愛。祂刻意藉著祝福小孩，宣示他們為天國子民的模範——由此可見耶穌是多麼看重小孩！

回顧現代社會的文明與進步，聯合國已於1989年通過了「兒童權利公約」，1994年該公約擴展至香港，可見今日的國際社會亦如耶穌當年般非常重視兒童。我們教育工作者更是如此，因為我們的服務對象，幾乎全都是未滿十八歲的兒童和青少年。就讓我們一同反覆思量，上主藉著以上一段福音，要帶給我們什麼訊息？

耶穌為了那些卑微小子，反而訓責了懷著善意替祂設想的門徒。究竟小孩子擁有哪些品格特質，可讓他們進入天國，以致耶穌認定天主的國是屬於充份體現這些品格特質的人？我們成年人可以怎樣「像小孩子一樣接受天主的國」呢？我們作為教育工作者或家長，做了些甚麼，讓小孩子保存著堪稱天國子民的品格特質？我們一直都刻意引領小孩子到耶穌跟前去，還是有意無意間阻止了他們親近祂？

門徒因排拒了小孩子而遭耶穌訓責，我們今天如何反觀自己？我們成年人一旦因事務繁重而接應不暇，一般都會靈活變通或作出妥協，惟在過程中，我們會否不自覺間犧牲了卑微弱小、未敢發聲者的福祉，或只從功利角度計算，放棄了一些重要價值和原則呢？

無論是在職場長袖善舞或苦戰其中的「六分鐘爸爸\*」們，還是在學校忙於開會及提交各式各樣文件的中、高層教師，都該想一想：我們究竟應為誰辛苦為誰忙？雖

然各人都想讓孩子享有安穩環境及展能機會，但我們更應為陶冶他們的品格而以愛相伴和指導，絕不能偏離這目標和意義，讓自己迷失在繁瑣的職務中，令孩子失去我們最寶貴的關愛和伴隨。

「……因為天主的國正屬於這樣的人（小孩子）……。」為甚麼小孩子能中悅天主呢？所謂「人之初，性本善」，稚子皆有善良的本質（智 8: 19-20）。小孩子從初生即表現天真無邪、摯誠無偽、純潔無瑕，為父母帶來無限的喜悅與歡笑。小孩子對父母、師長全然的信任與投靠，依偎在雙親身旁那無憂無慮、心滿意足的稚子臉龐，最令人陶醉。

我們為父為母為人師的，可有只顧埋首於沒完沒了的公職私務，而忽略了小孩子？可仍記得預留心靈空間，去重新發現和欣賞小孩子的謙遜溫順、善良坦率、哭笑自然、表裡如一、清澈通透、了無機心與毫不計較？可仍能與他們在言簡而情深的寒暄中，或促膝以童心童話彼此交流中，去感受、品嚐小孩子「無聲名之累，無利祿之念，不巧謀計算，不虛飾矯情」的赤子心？可有被「其對萬事悲天憫人之情、其對萬物尋根好奇之切、其對真理之上下求索」的稚子心所觸動呢？

「誰若不像小孩子一樣接受天主的國，決不能進去。」成年人都曾經是小孩子，曾幾何時都擁有同樣的稚子心，只是經年累月因生活環境的沖刷，心境都在不知不覺中被改造了。可不是嗎？是非之心人皆有之，小孩子尤其單純、直接地按照天性，展現他們對是非對錯的執著；可惜成年人總會對利害得失有多幾分計算和考量，他們因而很難做到像小孩子一樣接受天主的國。

以近年公營學校的生態環境為例，在「縮班殺校」陰影下，坊間的「學校排名榜」與教育局定下的「最低開班人數」，頓然成為最關鍵的指標，是故教師甚至學校之間，呈現了惡性競爭，甚或有人以違反專業道德的吹噓，作為吸引學生的手段。同樣地，營利公司一貫都崇尚「成本效益」及「利潤最大化」等原則，屬下僱員為要展示出眾的表現，遂將同事的成就視為威脅，對自己卻隱過揚功。在如此機構文化下營營役役，我們日漸變得世故老練，連喜怒哀樂也要按情勢加以隱藏和調整，更不可能做到「是其所是、非其所非」。假如我們做人的情操與天國的規範顯得格格不入，又怎能進入那國度呢！

凡事都追求對未來的掌控，以確保個人最大利益，實是源於內心過度焦躁憂慮及缺乏安全感，這種焦慮在父母面對子女成長時尤為明顯。他們憂心子女能否順利完成學業，日後能否自理而獨立生活，能否養家活兒，會否出人頭地…。眼看子女長大後，仍要在升學或就業上面對激烈競爭，家長更要求孩子成績獨佔鰲頭，要求孩子擁有多元智能和十八般武藝。由於家長一心要催谷子女「贏在起跑線」，遂出現了「虎爸虎媽」採取嚴厲手段，務求子女滿足他們的嚴格要求，以及事事關心和干預的「直升機家長」。當那不健康的競爭文化充斥著整個社會時，在耳濡目染下，青少年的品格特質與價值觀亦逐漸變得市儈，這已直接或間接令他們無法懷著純真的心親近耶穌了！

無奈地，有違人性而不利小孩子成長的惡性競爭文化，早已熏染了繁榮富裕的本港社會，令包括家長與教師的成年人無法擺脫它的影響，導致他們在心理和靈性上亦同受若干程度的損害。當個人與社群無法克服共同遇到的挑戰時，政府便有責任挺身而出，扮演較積極的角色，倡議並引導社會各階層致力改善精神生活的質素，範圍可包括為各行各業制訂「對家庭友善」的勞工政策；替家長提供更具成效的親職培育課程；讓公營學校的教師進一步紓減非教學工作，釋放足夠空間以利陪伴及輔導學生成長；成立獨立公營組織負責兒童事務，尤其落實和監察維護兒童權利的政策，並以兒童的最佳利益來檢視為兒童提供的服務。

若從信仰的角度反思，我們屈從於競爭文化而常忐忑不安，其實大多源於我們的信德薄弱，亦很可能由於我們忽略了耶穌非常重要的一句話：「你們先該尋求天主的國和它的義德，這一切自會加給你們。」(瑪 6: 33) 倘若我們全心信靠天主，我們既不用憂慮自己和孩子未來的生活，又無需為求己益而要事事掌控，心境自然會豁然開朗，能與孩子共存赤子心、稚子情，完全依靠天父，將未來交託祂引領。

然而，我們該如何尋求天主的國和它的義德呢？天主是愛，尋求天國就是尋求愛的國度，接受上主以祂的愛統治我們內心，並且還愛於祂。我們尋求義德，就是要毫無保留地讓天主和我們的近人，獲得來自我們每人按本份所應付出的愛。因此，我們一切的思言行為應建基於愛，並應持守對上主的信仰和敬拜，以及對人的正義。就如先知所言「履行正義，愛好慈善，虛心與你的天主來往。」(米 6:8)

要實踐社會及國際公義殊不簡單，但最少可由近至遠，先從家庭及學校裡的小孩子開始，力行仁愛與公義。聯合國《兒童權利公約》所強調的兒童四大權利，包括：生存權、發展權、受保護權及參與權，都是世上所有兒童應得的。要履行公義，我們就應設法確保每名兒童能享有基本生存所需的，例如充足食物、房屋、清潔食水、基本醫療服務等；能接受免費正規教育，享受閒暇及文化活動；可免受任何形式的虐待、疏忽照顧和剝削；擁有表達意見的權利，享受社會、經濟、文化、宗教生活，並能參與集會及接觸各種有益身心的資訊。

不過，履行公義只是最基本的責任，仁愛則要求我們更多走一步：我們給予小孩子不單只是生存權，還要引導他們過有內涵、有意義、有目標的生活；發展權不單只是發展天賦潛能和享受閒暇及文化活動，還要引導他們與上主連繫及分享祂那更豐盛的生命；受保護權不單只是保障他們免受剝削虐待，還要引導他們甘願為愛主愛人而作出奉獻，克己裕人，甚至犧牲；參與權不單只是讓他們參與公民社會並表達意見，還要引導他們勇於為真理、為主的愛宣講及作見證。

「讓小孩子到我跟前來，不要阻止他們！」這是耶穌給我們的邀請。為回應這邀請，身為教師或家長的我們，必須與孩子一起保持內心充滿純真、謙遜、憐憫和互信；更要去除以自我為中心，冀圖掌控未來而產生的焦慮，回復對主對人的信賴和赤誠。縱使我們領悟到給孩子作伴，引導他們親近耶穌的重要性，惟無奈當前俗世價值觀



念如鋪天蓋地般侵蝕人心，故此無論教師或家長，均須先鞏固個人對天主的信德；只有信德堅強的成年人，方能成為伴隨孩子邁步追尋真理和生命的同行者。

但願我們成年人與小孩子一起學習昔日那名毫不計較的無名小子，在耶穌和門徒面對五千名飢餓群眾時，能抱著對主耶穌的全然信賴，傾盡棉薄之力，主動獻出那原本於事無濟的五餅二魚，交付於祂大能的手中（若 6:9），因為我們知道祂必會成就一切。

天主教香港教區  
天主教教育事務處

二零一八年九月一日

（\* 按 1995 年香港電台電視部鏗鏘集引用的調查報告指香港父親平均每日只會有 6 分鐘與子女相處；惟按 2006 年港大民意網站調查子女平均每天與父及母的有意義溝通分別為 18 及 30 分鐘。）

## Education Day 2018

### Let the Children Come to Me (Mark 10:14)

*'And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.'* (Mk 10:13-16)

At the time of Jesus the Hebrew culture was rather different from the Greek or the Roman, and would not undervalue the status of children. The Jews regarded children as precious gifts from God. (Gn 30:20; Gn 33:5; 1 S 1:18, 20; Ps 127:3) It was an appropriate and common practice too that the people would bring children to be touched by Jesus, as this tradition derived from the occasion on which Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons and blessed them. (Gn 48:9,14)

Why did the disciples rebuke those bringing children to Jesus? Apparently, by preventing the children from approaching Jesus, they thought they might help reduce Jesus' tiresome burden as He was constantly facing large crowds asking Him to drive out demons, to heal the sick, to teach and to guide them. He was already exhausted dealing with the grown-ups. Who could still have the vigour to tend to these insignificant little ones?

*"When Jesus saw this he became indignant....."* According to the Bible, this was one of the three incidents when Jesus was offended by others. His anger was not resentment, but out of piety and love. Through His blessing the children, He intentionally declared them to be among the exemplary figures in the kingdom of God, which manifested how highly He valued them.

Looking back on the progress made in our modern-day civilized society, in 1989 the United Nations enacted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which eventually came into force in Hong Kong in 1994. The present-day international arena values the children just as at Jesus' time. This is true particularly for school educators since almost all of those served by them are under the age of 18. So let us ponder deeply upon the Gospel passage cited above and contemplate on Our Lord's messages for us.

In defence of those insignificant minors, Jesus reproved the disciples though they might have acted out of good will. What actually are the attributes commonly found in children which enable them to be worthy of the kingdom of God, as Jesus had acknowledged? How do we grown-ups *"accept the kingdom of God like a child....."*? What have we done, as educators or parents, to enable children to preserve these qualifying attributes? Are we persistently and intentionally leading them to Jesus, or are we preventing them unknowingly?

The disciples were rebuked by Jesus for having rejected the children. With self-reflection, are we aware we have unwittingly done likewise? When we grown-ups are faced with overly hectic schedules, we tend to become pragmatic and flexible, and inevitably make compromises.

Would we unwittingly do so at the expense of the well-being of the meek, or leaving their voices unheard? Would we give up some essential values and principles for reasons of expediency or pragmatic calculation?

As parents, whether we are high-flyers in our careers, or merely those “6-minute papas”\* struggling in our jobs for survival, or as teachers, who are swamped with paperwork, documentation and meetings, we all need to ask the same question, namely, for whose benefits we are striving. Though we all wish to provide our children with a stable and favourable environment conducive to developing their full potential, we should never allow ourselves to be lost amidst our endless tasks, so as not to deprive our children of our loving care and company. We must provide our children with our loving presence and guidance, which is crucial to the healthy formation of their character. We must stay focused on this aim, which makes our endeavours meaningful.

*“... ..for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Children).....”* What traits of these children have delighted God? Children are good by nature and have unsullied souls. (W's 8:19-20) They are pure, simple, innocent, sincere and genuine, bringing to their parents boundless joy and laughter. They place total trust and reliance on their parents and teachers. Their carefree, contented and lovely looks, as they cling to their parents, have always been most enchanting.

As parents and teachers, have we been so much submerged in our never-ending business and personal matters, that we have ignored these little ones? Has it ever come to our mind that we need to set aside space in our heart to re-discover and appreciate their meekness and humility, their docility and frankness, their spontaneous laughter and tears, their crystal-clear consistency in thoughts and acts, as well as their uncalculating mind and unstinting heart? When at times we have brief but caring chats with them, or when we engage in a deep, frank conversation with them in their own style and manner, could we still feel and appreciate their innocence and detachment from any personal ties to fame, honour, profits and interests, and their immunity from scheming, manipulation, pretence and deception? Do we find ourselves touched and moved by their great compassion towards people, their genuine curiosity in probing into the sources of knowledge of the world and beyond, and their persistence in search of the Truth?

*“.....Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.”* All of us grown-ups have once been children. We all possessed such a child-like heart and soul once, both of which have been slowly and subtly tainted as the years go by, though. Man has an innate sense of right and wrong, doesn't he? The simple, innocent and naïve children, in particular, find no alternative way to express their instinctive views of right and wrong, other than a straight-forward and direct manner; whereas sophisticated grown-ups will inevitably reckon and consider their personal gain and loss involved thereof. Consequently adults may find it difficult to embrace the kingdom of God like a child.

Taking the eco-environment of public sector schools as an example, the “school ranking” league tables compiled unofficially by the media, and the “minimum student enrolment pertinent to approved class entitlement” as set by the Education Bureau, have become crucial key indicators. Vicious competitions among teachers and among schools as well have arisen,

even resulting in unprofessional, boastful misrepresentation to attract more students in some cases. Similarly, “cost-effectiveness” and “maximization of profits” have always been the mottos of profit-making establishments. Bragging about merits and covering up of faults are common strategies to “out-perform” peers and impress the boss, whereas achievements of colleagues are regarded as threats to one’s own interests. We gradually become seasoned and sophisticated after having immersed in such an organizational culture, thus becoming reluctant to express openly our emotions without deliberately adjusting ourselves to the circumstances, not to mention following our innate urges to uphold the truth or to right the wrong. If our attitudes and sentiments towards life are so distinctly at variance with the norm of those worthy of the kingdom of God, how could we be part of it?

The pressing need to manipulate the future and ensure the greatest benefits for oneself may actually originate from one’s excessive anxieties and intense sense of insecurity. This is especially obvious in parents when their children are growing up. Parents worry about whether their children could successfully complete their studies; whether they could manage their lives independently, raise a family or surpass others in their careers. Anticipating the fierce competitions that await their children in their later years of studies or in the job markets, parents demand their children to be among the top few in their academic performance, with well-developed multiple intelligences as well as a comprehensive range of skills and talents. As parents push their children to outshine their peers at the very early stages of life, they have unwittingly become “Tiger Parents”, who are very stern with their kids, compelling them to attain the very high performance standards they have set. Other parents have become “Helicopter Parents”, whose watchful eyes are obsessed with watching closely every move of their children and interfering with each and every aspect of their lives. When youngsters are continuously subjected to such an unhealthy competitive culture in society, the noble nature of their character will eventually degenerate into a worldly and undignified one. Such worldliness will directly or indirectly impact on their souls, preventing them from remaining pure of heart and staying close to Jesus as before.

The prosperous and affluent society of Hong Kong has long been imbued with a culture of callously vicious competitiveness, which is undesirable for children’s development. Even adults, including parents and teachers, helplessly suffer psychological and spiritual hurts from it inevitably. When challenges can neither be overcome by the individuals nor by the communities, the government should step in to play a more active role to champion and facilitate a concerted effort of various sectors of society to enhance their spiritual well-being. The government should endeavour to put forward “family friendly” labour policies for all walks of life; provide more effective formation programmes on parenting; further reduce non-teaching workloads of teachers in public sector schools so as to ensure adequate space for teachers and enable them to accompany and to counsel students on their path to maturity; and lastly to set up an independent public organization to take charge of children’s affairs, particularly to implement and monitor policies protecting children’s rights. It should also review all the services provided to children to safeguard their best interests.

If we reflect on our submission to such a competitive culture in the light of our faith, we would probably feel uneasy as this shows just how little faith we have in Christ, for we might have overlooked one of His very important statements, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.”* (Mt 6:33) If we have faith and

trust in God whole-heartedly, we need not worry about the livelihood of our children and ours in the future; neither do we need to manipulate anything for the sake of personal benefits. We shall then be blessed with a sudden self-realization coupled with peace of mind, which enables us to share the child-like innocence and compassion, as displayed by our children, and count on our Heavenly Father totally, entrusting our future to His loving guidance.

But how are we to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness? God is Love. To seek the kingdom of God is to seek the kingdom of Love, to let His Love reign in our hearts and to love Him in return. To seek His righteousness is to have a constant and resolute will to give to God and our neighbours their due of our love. Therefore, all our thoughts, words and deeds should originate from love. We should persevere in cherishing our faith, worshipping God and doing justice to mankind just as what has been said, "...and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God."(Mi 6:8)

It is no simple task for us to actualize social and international justice, but at least we can go from near to far, and start with giving our loving concern and doing justice to children in our families and schools. The "Convention on the Rights of the Child" of the United Nations emphasizes four major rights of children all over the world, including the Right to Survival, the Right to Development, the Right to Protection and the Right to Participation. To seek righteousness, we should do everything to ensure that each child can enjoy what is essential for keeping alive, e.g. adequate food, safe shelter, clean water, health services, etc. We should ensure each of the children be able to enjoy free formal education, leisure and participation in cultural activities. We should provide them with protection from any forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation. They should have the freedom of expression and be able to enjoy social, economic, cultural and religious activities; to take part in associations and peaceful assemblies; and be able to access information from diverse sources for personal growth.

However, to realize justice is only fulfilling our very basic responsibilities. Love demands us to go a step further. We should give our children not only their rights to survival, but should guide them into a meaningful and purposeful life. The right to development is not only about developing talents and enjoying leisure and cultural activities. We should also guide them into a lasting tie with our Lord Jesus and a share of His life, which is even more abundant. The right to protection is not only shielding them from exploitation and abuse. We should as well inspire them to forgo the self for the love of God and for the good of others, even by going so far as to sacrifice oneself. The right to participation is not only about involving in the civil society and expressing themselves. We need to further motivate them to speak aloud courageously so as to bear witness to the truth and God's love for us.

*"Let the children come to me; do not prevent them."* This is an invitation by Jesus to which we must respond. As educators and parents, we yearn to stay alike with our children and maintain a pure, humble, compassionate and trusting heart. We seek to refrain from being self-centered and from attempts to manoeuvre, which may breed anxieties. We should strive to revive our total trust and absolute sincerity towards God, and likewise towards man. Even though we understand the importance of accompanying our children so as to guide them to Jesus, we may feel powerless as we face up to the worldly culture that proves so overwhelmingly corrosive. Thus parents and educators must first be steadfast in our faith in

God. Only then can we grown-ups be the partners of our children in their search for Truth and Life.

Together with our children, may we grown-ups follow the exemplar of the anonymous boy, a non-calculating one among the five thousand hungry crowd gathering in front of Jesus and the disciples. Placing absolute trust in Jesus, and emptying himself of all that he possessed, the boy volunteered to offer the five loaves and two fish, apparently so insignificant a quantity in a seemingly futile attempt to give aid, and commended them into the mighty hands of Jesus.

(Jn 6:9) For we know, He shall accomplish all things.

Catholic Education Office  
Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong  
1.9.2018

(\* According to a survey quoted by a 1995 episode of "Hong Kong Connection," a TV program produced by the Radio-Television Hong Kong, fathers in Hong Kong only stayed in the company of their children for 6 minutes on average each day. According to another survey in 2006 on the HKU Pop Site of the Public Opinion Program of the University of Hong Kong, children in Hong Kong had 18 minutes and 30 minutes of meaningful communication with their fathers and mothers, respectively.)