

## AN INNOCENT PRESENCE

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

Picture the scene. Disciples of Jesus were concerning themselves with the question of who is greatest.

“And Jesus called a little child to Him.” And He set that little child “in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:3). (Notice that phrase “in the midst.” We will mention it again.)

The disciples started listening with a different attitude because of the presence of a little child in their midst.

Another scene is more dramatic. In its human conflict this one puts us in mind of some of our own life situations. Strife in the paths we walk is similar to theirs.

Once they had been walking and arrived at a certain house. Jesus asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road? But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest” (Mark 9:34).

They would not speak of it openly to their Master, but it was evident in their mood. Jesus first sat down, and then invited them to come near to Him. “Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said....”

Having set the child in their midst did Jesus wait a few moments before lifting the child and giving His message? The close presence of the child made a difference.

Do you notice the effect that the presence of little children can have?

Theologian Emanuel Swedenborg says that little children are direct receivers of what is called “innocence.” This vital innocence is received from God by children and influences people around them.

There is a chapter on innocence in the book *Heaven and Hell*. In this we read that innocence “shines forth from the face of children and from some of their movements and from their first speech, and affects those about them.”

Swedenborg says that innocence has a way of taming what is evil and eliminating the harmful effects thereof. He says that this is contained in the saying of Isaiah: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them.”

“Child” and “Lamb” are two key Biblical symbols of innocence. And those two symbols apply in an eminent way to Jesus. “Unto us a Child is born . . . and His name shall be called Wonderful.” Think of the years after the child was born before there was any public knowledge of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

There was a silent presence. “He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10). It was John the Baptist who announced to people, “There stands one among you whom you do not know.” The word “among” in the Greek is the same as “in the midst.”

So at first we have an unidentified presence in the midst. And then The Baptist points Him out and calls Him “The Lamb of God.” And what is the Lamb already accomplishing? “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

In gratitude for His healing presence we can gather, responding to the promise: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

*Reprinted with permission from The Intelligencer-Record, Doylestown, PA, USA.*