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| Feast of the Sto. Niño |
| Isaiah 9:1-6 |
| Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18 |
| Mark 10:13-16 |

**A. Text/Context**

* Where did the devotion to the Sto. Niño all begin?
* When I made a little research on the history of the devotion of the Sto. Niño a few years before what I found out is that there is a Franciscan religious behind
* It was during the period in the 15th century that a small image of the Santo Niño was carved out from the wood of an olive tree taken from Jerusalem
* And from there, it was brought to Rome by a Franciscan friar and from then on devotion has started in Europe
* Here in the Philippines, the devotion started in Cebu. Tradition tells us that it was a gift to Queen Juana by Ferdinand Magellan after she was baptized by the Spanish missionaries and from there the devotion spread all over the Philippines
* In Davao City we also have a popular private shrine of the Child Jesus known as the Infant Jesus of Prague
* The replica came from the Republic of Czechoslovakia in Eastern Europe brought by a devout private citizen
* But the more popular tradition of the devotion comes from the Sto. Niño of Cebu relative to the Sinulog Festival
* Anyway, the devotion to the Sto. Niño marks a very important milestone in the faith of the people. It marks the beginning of Christianity here in the Philippines
* The Sto. Niño is the Child Jesus whose traits and character are what the Filipinos love to adore and worship so much
* And the gospel today talks to us about children brought to Jesus so that he might touch them
* In the gospel today. Many children were brought to Jesus so that he might touch them. And the disciples tried to stop the children from going near to Jesus
* And as the evangelist Mark tells us that people were bringing the children to Jesus so that he might touch them
* So it was not even the wish of the children to go near Jesus. It was perhaps the parents or guardians who brought their children to Jesus to be touched probably to be healed of their sickness
* We cannot blame the disciples on how they reacted because the disciples knew very well that the children are really a nuisance to serious conversations
* When Jesus saw that the children are prevented to go near him he became indignant and said to them
* Let the children come to me, do not prevent them for the KOG belongs to such as these
* Whoever does not accept the KOG like a child will not enter it

**B. Human Situation**

* Now as Christians, we ask why is it that Jesus is saying that if we do not accept the KOG like a child we will not be able to enter into it. What are the characteristics of a child?
* A child is a picture of innocence and are therefore exempted from committing a sin by virtue of that. A child is an example of innocence
* They are not corrupted in their actions because they do not yet know what is right or wrong
* The disposition of a child is an example of a true, honest, and even unblemished intentions and motivations
* If you promise something to a child, the child will believe and he will hope and rely on that promise to come true even if we have already forgotten our promise
* A child is also an example of the value of a full trust and confidence in God
* These are the things that we need to emulate from the children as adult Christians
* That is why we celebrate Sto. Niño with so much revelry especially in Cebu
* There is an emotional overflow in us knowing that the God we believe and adore has also been once a child like us so innocent and so vulnerable. The devotion stems from our love of children
* That is why it is the moral obligation of the parents not only to clothe and feed and shelter them but most of all the parents must raise their children in a home where an atmosphere of love prevails
* When I was still a seminarian, we had an exposure with orphans at the Hospicio in Manila
* There I found out just how deprived children are. When you enter the dormitory children will be running all wanting to be carried
* They have enough food in the orphanage, many toys but they will leave everything just to be cuddled
* That means that they long for the warmth of embrace and the love of a parent
* When I was in theology, I had another exposure with street children in the metropolis. It’s even worse, children grew up in the streets protected by the hoodlums of the underworld
* They are trained to beg and to snatch and they become little criminals and every child has a horrible story to tell
* Children are abused by the very people who are supposed to care for them, physically, sexually, verbally
* They are battered and maimed for life aside from the daily fare of invectives and foul language
* The home has become a dungeon of torture and they have to run away, they landed on the streets
* They have become very dysfunctional. They can’t even understand why is it that others have Papa or Mama. They are so broken
* Blessed are the children who grow up in a regular family setting because when they grow up they will be able to discern what is good or bad and they will be responsible of their actions in a state of freedom
* But how about the children who are broken? Where have all the responsible parents gone?
* My brothers and sisters, the worst crime that a human being can do is to commit a crime against the innocent
* And there are so many. We talk about abortion, abandonment, child battery, molestation, discrimination, name it you’ll have it
* What makes the sin so horrible is that the victim, or the child, or the unborn is totally helpless
* According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, roughly 800,000 children are reported missing each year in the United States – that's roughly 2,000 per day
* Very shocking! And where did all those children who disappeared go? Child prostitution, child pornography, sexual slavery, sources for organ transplants
* The infants are also offered and killed on satanic altars as a sacrifice to the devil. It is so horrific

**C. Challenge**

* This is the challenge that the celebration of the Feast of Sto. Niño brings us today
* We are reminded that as adult Christians we need to protect the young and the innocent
* We are reminded to emulate the childlike virtues of a child
* We strive to emulate the virtues of a child: the purity of intentions, the value of hope, the full and the total trust and confidence in the provident God
* And while we strive to protect the helpless from the machinations of all evils
* At the same time, we also strive to possess a childlike heart like that of a child so we will all be worthy to enter the KOG