

## DADDY - MY FRIENDS DON'T PLAY WITH ME ANYMORE

One of the saddest things that parents ever hear, when their child is in elementary school, is that the other children do not want to play with their child. The parent sees the tears, sees the hurt, sees the expression of exclusion in the face of the child. "Is there something wrong with my child?" "Is there something I can do to correct this?" "Should I talk to the other parents?" The parent, in so many ways, is the "fixer." Sometimes this is because the parent cannot bear seeing the pain in the child, but sometimes it's because the parent has had similar experiences - not only when they were the age of their child but even now. "No one wants to play with me." Of course, the older one becomes, he or she becomes aware of ways to deal with such feelings: ego defense mechanisms such as rationalization, projection, sublimation and withdrawal. For many adults, the anger that they feel for believing that no one wants to "play with me" becomes anger - sometimes directed towards others with the intensity of many years of having those feelings - to the turning in of the anger, resulting in depression - to additional, projected fears of future rejections which results in anxiety. Indeed, no matter how old a person is, the hurts and real or perceived slights of the past lie dormant ready to spring forward the moment a similar, albeit, adult situation reminiscent of childhood occurs. It gives a whole new meaning to "Everything I needed to know I learned in Kindergarten." That includes a wide range of social rejections.

Loners are often people who are not emotional risk takers. They may well either "play alone" or may isolate emotionally, in order not to be further hurt. Their adage is often, "never expect anything and then you will never be disappointed." Sadly, many Christians project all of these feelings onto God the Father, and He can become the symbol of "all men who ever broke my heart, rejected me, ignored me, yelled at me, or hurt me in any number of ways." God the Father is, in many ways, much more pliable in the minds of people since "no one has seen the Father." But Jesus, God the Son, breaks the perceived mold. Through the Incarnation, "the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us." That is, God "came down" and decided to play with us; He decided to include us. He demonstrated to us and still does today, His willingness to pay the price of our pain and pay the price of those whom we perceived were never admonished for the ways in which they treated us. Now - our real friend, Jesus, plays with us - to such an extent that when the game is over, He wants to continue to play with us, and is willing to take us to an endless state of being with Him, never being rejected, and always being loved.

In this world, we can connect with our Heavenly playmate by playing and praying. Worship is a type of "Holy Play." In particular, Traditional worship and liturgy convey ways in which we have been "playing" with God for many centuries by the use of every one of the five senses that He gave to us as gifts. In this "holy play" we always win - because God has designed our play time to include constant connection with Him by praying when we are playing. "Playing" in Church is different from "playing church." The former means linking up with the **ongoing joy** of the connection between the Mass - which is a foretaste of Heaven - and Heaven itself where life is described as a nonstop Liturgy - a nonstop Mass where Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father. The latter is where many of the structures of a fallen world are incorporated into an ecclesial institution.

It is God's will that everyone participate in His plan, but there are those who simply do not want to play. They find the game to be boring, they want to change the rules, or perhaps they want

everyone else to participate in playing with God precisely as they play. Or, maybe they think that by having a nice thought or two occasionally about playing is simply enough. God's love for us is so great that he neither forces us to play or pray. He wants the players and prayers to contain a love that carries with it appreciation - so that we can understand that each one of us has a purpose and plays an important part in His plan for others.

As we children become older, we begin to see that the children we enjoyed playing with most begin to leave us. In one sense, they did not leave, but at least to us they are no longer with us. When we see that God's plan for us includes being with Him forever, we also discover that the "game" was much bigger than we could have ever imagined - and that those with whom we enjoyed life the most can now play without pain, grief, exhaustion, and many limitations.

Letting go of those with whom we have played is never easy, but knowing that a place has been prepared for us gives us hope. And in the end, we can see that much of the game we played in this world was simply exercise, preparing for the endless one with the One who will never allow us again to claim "My friends don't play with me anymore."