

## A Note from Fr. Phil

December 6th is the feast of Jolly ol' Saint Nicholas. The Real Saint Nick was not always so jovial. At the Council of Nicea, Nicholas was arrested and imprisoned for planting his fist into another bishop's face. Today our prelates do not always agree or get along, but at least, they seem to be civil. Most of the time.

His temper, notwithstanding, Saint Nicholas has become a patron saint of children because of his generosity and kindness toward the young. I wonder if his feast day being celebrated during the last month of the year is the reason that Advent and Christmas are mostly for and about children. Regardless, during these days leading up to Christmas, it would be well to pray for children. This is no easy time to grown up. The uncertainty, the fear, the social distancing, the hardships.

Pray for children who face violence in any form. Those who are mistreated. Those who have been aborted. Those who have been abducted. Those who have been abandoned and those who have been displaced. Those who are trafficked and those who are prostituted. Those who are victims of war. Those who have been hurt maliciously in any way. We pray for mercy. We ask God for help. We ask a blessing upon all wounded children.

There is another child to keep in mind and prayer during the holiday season: our own inner child. That child, too, likely has been neglected for way too long. A child that once knew that the clouds, the sun, the moon, the stars, the snow, the rain, the earth, the rivers, the streams, the trees, the plants, the animals, and people all belong to one another. The child that sometimes likes to play and to color outside the lines. A child who imagines, creates, and can be anything or anyone he or she wants to be for whole afternoons at a time. A child who is not embarrassed to sing or dance or cry. A child who takes a step, falls down, and manages to get up again. A child that trusts.

The inner child is the soul of a person who has been created in God's image and likeness. The one who can lead a wolf, lion, lamb, or ox, leopard, kid, calf and cobra to peace. The child who can imagine together with the prophet Isaiah a place where the mute speak, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the crippled run wild and jump up and down excitedly. This is the child who brushes her teeth, says her prayers, and tells mommy and daddy that she loves them. Not a bad spirituality, that. Taking care of her body, praying and telling someone everyday, "I love you."

This child may have been neglected way too long in the souls of many. Perhaps during these wonder filled seasons of Advent and Christmas, that child who is 3, 8, or 83 may be given permission to come out and play once again.

I think that Christ would like that. And so would Saint Nick.

