



The Atonement Academy
CATHOLIC + CLASSICAL

April 8, 2020

Dear Lower School Families,

Our Lord exhorts in Mark 10:15, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter.” While much may be said about what our Lord means by being childlike as a condition to our entering his kingdom, I venture one possibility with the hope of enriching our appreciation of the approaching season of Easter, our faith and even reality itself. That possibility, one that I am especially drawn to as a lower school administrator, teacher and a father of young children, is found in the childlike vision of the fairy tale.

Anyone who has spent time with young children quickly realizes the barriers between reality and fantasy are not as impregnable for them as for adults. A stick is never just a stick, but a spear, gun or sword; bricks, stones and rocks magically transform into the most beautifully decorated and scrumptious of cakes. Similar transformations occur in fairy tales, where frogs become princes, mice become horses and pumpkins carriages. In “The Ethics of Elfland,” a chapter in *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton contends that fairy tales, the literary expression of the fecund imagination of a child, are not just fanciful childish fun, but unmask the character and foundation of reality itself.

Unlike the law of reason by which two and one *must* make three, one can easily imagine, contrary to the laws of nature, trees bearing, not fruit, but “golden candlesticks or tigers hanging on by the tail,” or a falling apple ignoring gravity to bypass the nose of the person directly below to go in search of a nose for “which it had a more definite dislike.” Fairy tales thus reveal the physical universe could have been otherwise and that underlying the world’s fundamental contingency is a radically free creator who not only might have created any number of worlds, but reigns supremely over the so called “laws” of the nature he created. From this perspective miraculous indeed it is that the sun runs its course and water runs downhill. This is “fairy godmother philosophy,” as Chesterton calls it, and it affords us the childlike vision necessary to see reality as it truly is – full of wonder, mystery and magic.

If true of the physical world God created, as Christians, we should be so much less surprised that our faith is so full of the mysterious and unexpected transformations and reversals of the fairy tale: physically sustaining water, bread and wine become sources of spiritual life; defying earthy wisdom, “the last shall be first” and “the meek inherit the hearth”; God unimaginably emptying himself to become man so man can share in God’s divine life; and now in Holy Week with Easter approaching, our Lord enters Jerusalem as a king, but humbly riding on an ass, is crucified as a common criminal ingloriously on the cross, then rises gloriously from death to sit, not merely as a king, but as *the* king of the universe at the right hand of God the Father Almighty in heaven.

In Easter, the very essence of our faith, we encounter the most wondrous of fairy tale magic. Marvelously, through our Lord’s resurrection, we have a prince who lovingly awakens us from an otherwise perpetual slumber, the consequence of our wayward partaking of the wicked witch’s sin and death poisoned apple, to join him in his kingdom to live happily ever after. Easter is in our fairy tales because Easter is *the* fairy tale *par excellence*. For we celebrate in Easter the conquest over the one ineluctable certainty of the so called “real world” – death. By uniting ourselves to Christ’s passion and death, death is no longer the inescapable finality it appears to be, but a mere passing into eternal beatitude, the joy of the kingdom of God. Thus, while the fairy



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tale, as Chesterton points out, shows that reality might have been otherwise; Easter is our childlike fairy tale vision and confidence that it *is* otherwise.

As we journey with our Lord through his passion, death and resurrection, I pray that we be granted the childlike vision to perceive more deeply the astonishing mystery of his saving action and the entry into his kingdom it makes possible. I pray too that you and your family have a restful Easter break and that the rest of Holy Week and the coming Easter season be a source of abundant blessings and grace.

Sincerely Yours,

John D. Creech
Dean of Lower School