

The penny hasn't dropped about the true nature of discipleship. They think it is about glory, prestige and power. Jesus speaks simply in terms of service – and of the cost of service. It is as if the disciples are still up there on their religious mountain, refusing to come down to face the consequences – and the cost – of their faith in Christ.

## Application

What does Jesus' teaching about the need to be "servant of all" and to welcome little children mean for us today? In the society of Jesus' day, a child was someone of no legal status – in a sense, an unimportant person. And so anything done to or for a child was done simply for the sake of the child, without hope of reward or advantage. This was an opportunity to show genuine, disinterested love, unfeigned respect.

This is to be the hallmark of Christ's disciples: that we will love without hope of profit or reward; that we will respect the intrinsic dignity and worth of others, no matter what their position, power or wealth. God loves unconditionally. When we love like that, then we are not just loving like God, we are loving God. In welcoming those who are lowest and least important, we are – in a very real way – welcoming and worshipping God. We are coming down from our religious mountain and putting our faith into practice.

There is always a price to be paid for true service. Love is not cost-free, even though that is an illusion that we – like the disciples – like to maintain. But Christ's teaching about the need to be prepared to suffer and die also contains the promise that this road leads to the glory of the resurrection. Like the monks of Oliveto, we have to decide if we want the illusion of pure, unsullied religion, or whether we are ready to get our hands dirty in serving real people in real situations, no matter what the cost. That is the only way to offer real love to God, and the only way to enter real, eternal life.