

*“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”*

In a world of eagles and hawks and vultures, Jesus said God watches every sparrow.

When you are feeling like a sparrow, watching the sky for hawks, the ground for cats, being harassed by the blue jays, there is comfort in knowing God’s eye is on the sparrow. Because sometimes it is not so obvious by the way things turn out.

Go to the Cleveland clinic – take a walk through the oncology wards – you will see a lot of sparrows. Some will fly again – a great many will – but some will not. Many of those you see may once upon a time been hawks but most of them know what it is to be a sparrow after disease and treatment have exhausted them.

Go to sit with a family whose son or father or sister or husband is in daily danger in Iraq. Maybe one will tell you how hard it is to hear the daily news – to dread the words U.S. soldiers killed. And to wonder – was she or he the one? A flock of sparrows hoping for a happy reunion.

Go to a village in Africa, watch the children whose parents have died before their time. Sparrows being hardened by the need to survive.

It is not so obvious that God is watching the sparrows, but Jesus said, “Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from your Father.” God is watching.

And then to make it clear that God is doing more than just watching, Jesus spoke these words: “whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

A little one – Jesus did not mean just size and age by this term though children are certainly included – but I think of all the sparrows who believe in Jesus as who Jesus is speaking of as little ones. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to a little one belonging to Jesus because they belong to Jesus will not lose his or her reward.

Jesus spoke these words to the little ones, his disciples. He had been telling them all the difficulties they would face in following him – how they would be treated the way he had been treated. He told them how even in their own families there would be conflict because they followed Jesus' way. And then he spoke of the cup of cold water for the little one.

God will reward those who help Jesus' little ones. That tells us something about God. God is not simply a God of the powerful and the successful. God's ears are not tuned only to the words of popes and bishops and pastors. God's eyes are not dazzled by the silver and gold that adorn great cathedrals. No, God's heart is with the little ones.

Once Jesus said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." I always keep that word of Jesus in my mind. It reminds me just how much the little ones mean to God.

On any given day, in any given moment any one of us here can be a little one. Take away the love of a husband or wife and the one who has depended on that love is suddenly a little one. Watch a pension disappear in a bankruptcy and a giant may suddenly be a little one. Let a son or daughter be declared incurably ill and a mother becomes a little one.

I think of the church as the place where the little ones are sheltered with the love of God. Sometimes you are the one who gives that love – sooner or later you will be the little one who receives it. Jesus says, "God is watching – even a cup of cold water given to a thirsty little one will be rewarded.

A lot of little ones in other lands need cups of water. Some of them belong to Jesus, some do not. Whatever you are able to do or give to help them will be noticed by God. God is watching.

And every day here there will be little ones also.

God thinks so much of little ones that when God came to this world he was one of them. No place for him but his mother's arms. No ripe old age and retirement and grandchildren for him, but a cruel death. All the hawks of the world descended and swept him away.

In time those who followed him came to understand it could have been no other way. Jesus had to live where the heart of God is – with the little ones.

If you are a little one this day, take heart, God is watching – rewarding every one who helps you. And if you are not a little one this day, then welcome a little one, walk with a little one, share a cup of cold water with a little one. You will not lose your reward.

