

Talks For Children

Arthur Tonne, O.F.M.



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ISBN: 978-0-9867081-9-0

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TALKS FOR CHILDREN

Sixty-three talks related to the old Gospel readings. Each talk begins with a story and last 8 minutes.

by
Msgr. Arthur Tonne

Fourth Printing

**DEDICATED TO
THE BOY CHRIST**

**Imprimatur:
Most Rev. David M. Maloney, S.T.D.
Bishop of Wichita, Kansas**

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INTRODUCTION

Many priests report that when they use these 'talks' at so-called Children's Mass, the church is crowded with grown-ups. Even grown-ups appreciate and relish a story and a simple thought in simple language. Try it.

Suggestions and a prayer are always appreciated by—

The Author.

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1st Sunday of Advent—LET'S PLAY

"Look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand." St. Luke, 21:28.

Did any of you boys ever play cop and robber, or cowboy and Indian, or train or fireman? When I was a boy I liked to play train, and make believe I was an engineer or conductor. Did any of you girls ever play house, or nurse, or teacher? I just know you did. It's lots of fun.

"Let's play" you boys and girls are always saying. Let's play house; let's play circus; let's play train; let's play store. You make believe you are the daddy and mama in a big house; you make believe you are the clown or the strong man or the acrobat in a circus; you make believe you are the grocer and some other boy or girl is the customer.

I've seen some of you scooting down the street in your wagon, playing truck and going, "Chug, chug." I've seen some of you tooting along like a train. Sometimes you play soldier; other times you play doctor and nurse; then you play policeman and fireman and cowboy. Why some boys and girls even play church and Mass.

Really you are not a policeman or a doctor or an engineer. You know that. But you make believe you are. And it's lots of fun making believe.

But, will you believe it—we priests also make believe. Yes, we do, and right here in church, too. Oh, yes, we know it is wrong to play in church but this is a kind of game Mother Church wants us to play.

Let us explain. Usually Mother Church is very solemn and very serious. She knows that God is great and she wants us to remember that God is great. That makes us serious.

But today, the first Sunday of Advent, Mother Church says to all of us, "Let's play." What game does Mother Church want us to play? Not baseball or jacks or hide-and-go-seek or policeman or anything like that. It is a much better game, and much more fun.

Let's play that Jesus never was born. Let's play that we are living thousands and thousands of years before Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Let's make believe that there never was a Christmas before, and that we are waiting for the first Christmas, we are waiting for Jesus to come into the world. It's a great game.

Sure, we know that Jesus was born 1948 years ago, but we are going to pray and act and live as if He had not yet been born. We are starting our game today, just four weeks before Christmas. Each of these four weeks will be like a thousand years before the coming of Christ. We priests are wearing purple vestments to show the sadness and the sorrow of those hundreds of years of waiting. We make believe that we are the chosen people of God, and really we are, like the Jews of old, who prayed and did penance and cried out for Christ to come.

Just imagine, just make believe, just play that you were a boy or girl living long before Christ came to us as a little Baby. How you would have

longed to see Him. How you would have longed to touch Him, and hold Him. How you would have longed to hear Him. How empty and sad life must have been when people had not yet seen the Savior.

That is the game Mother Church wants us to play during Advent. Advent means coming, the coming of Christ. Advent means the four weeks just before Christmas when we act as if Jesus had not yet come. We long for Him, we pray for Him, we do penance for Him, we get ready for Him.

"Come, come," the Church cries out to Jesus. "Come to us as our Lord and Savior. Come to save us and redeem us. Come to show us how to live. Come to make us love Thee."

But the best thing about our Advent game, boys and girls, is that it will come true. When you play doctor or engineer or priest, it does not always happen that you grow up and become a doctor or an engineer or a priest. But when you play Advent, when you make believe that Jesus is coming, it really does come true, it really does happen. Christ will really come on Christmas day.

More than at any other time we try to be good just before Christmas. Your mother has perhaps told you that Santa Claus will not come if you are bad. Jesus will not come either, if you are bad. And if Jesus does not come, neither will Santa Claus come.

Let's play, then, boys and girls, that we are waiting for Jesus. Let's play that He never had come to this earth and that we are getting ready for His coming now. Let's pray and study and obey and go to Holy Communion and Holy Mass and stop in church for a visit—just as if we wanted Jesus to come to each one of us. Then He will really come to each one of you. Amen.



2nd Sunday of Advent—A REALLY BRAVE BOY

"What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind."
St. Matthew, 11:7.

Dave, Dan and Billy were about 12 years old. Dave and Dan were brothers. Billy was their friend and playmate. On a hot, August afternoon they decided to go fishing. Not a breeze was stirring. Not a bird was chirping. Everybody was tired and lazy, everybody except David, Dan and Bill.

It wasn't long before they caught a long string of perch. They were tired and sweaty and it was just natural for Dave to suggest: "Let's take a swim. That will cool us off."

"Fine," shouted Dan, "last one in is a monkey."

But Bill made no move to go in. When they asked him what was the matter, he explained:

"I want to go in as much as you fellows, but mother has been reading about a lot of boys drowning lately and she made me promise that I would not go in swimming without her permission."

Dave and Dan looked at each other and laughed. "Your mother won't know the difference. Women are funny, anyway. Imagine, making a guy promise not to go swimming, especially in this hot weather."

They pulled off Bill's coat, but he stood his ground, saying: "You and Dan go in. I'll wait."

They knew that determined look on Bill's face. Even though they called him a coward and a sissy, he stuck to his guns, stretched out on the grass and watched the grasshoppers jumping around him. But not for long. Suddenly he heard a scream and then a cry: "Help, help." Dan had caught a cramp in the water and had thrown his arms around Dave's neck. But Dave pushed him off, because he was scared and selfish. Bill jumped to his feet, and with all his clothes on, made one leap into the water, swam over to Dan and pulled him in to shallow water, then dragged him to the shore—just in time. Bill saved Dan's life.

Now who was the coward? Who was the hero? Who was really brave? The brave boy is the one who tries to do what he is told no matter what happens. He is not afraid to give up a good time, even to give up a swell swim on a hot summer day, as Billy did. Billy was brave. He was brave of heart in refusing to go swimming without his mother's permission. He was brave of body when he jumped into the water to save Dan from drowning.

Jesus tells us today about another brave man. St. John the Baptist. Jesus tells us that St. John was anything but a reed or weed shaken by the wind. You have seen a big weed bending now this way now that wherever the wind would blow it. That's how cowards are. They bend this way and that. But heroes like St. John and Billy do not bend every old way. They stand up straight. They do what is right. They are brave.

St. John was brave of heart. He told the people about their sins. He stayed away from sin himself. He would take very little of the things he

liked to eat and drink. He even told the rich people that they had to give to the poor the money they did not need.

And then one day he told the king that he had committed a big crime. Imagine what courage that took—to go and tell the king himself that he had done something which was a big sin. That is why the king cut off St. John's head. But St. John wasn't afraid. He knew he was doing what God wanted him to do. He went ahead and did it.

I hope all of you boys and girls will be like St. John, brave of body and brave of heart. I hope you will try to do what is right because it is right, that is, because it is what God wants.

It is not easy to be brave like Billy and St. John. It takes a lot of courage to turn down a swim on a hot summer day. It takes a lot of courage to do what mother wants you to do when others are calling you a coward and a sissy. It takes a lot of courage to get up in the morning the first time your mother calls. It takes a lot of courage to stay away from boys and girls who say impure things and do impure things and show impure pictures. It takes a lot of courage to tell your sins to the priest and then to promise to try to do better. It takes a lot of courage to tip your hat when you pass church and others might be looking at you or even laughing at you. It takes a lot of courage to bless yourself and pray before meals. Yes, it takes lots and lots of courage always to do the right thing.

But I know that you boys and girls all want to be brave, you all want to be heroes like Billy and St. John. You can be, you will be, especially during these days before Christmas when we think how brave Jesus was to come as a little Baby into a big, cold world. Jesus was brave. St. John was brave. Billy was brave. Don't you want to be like them? Amen.



3rd Sunday of Advent—THE UNKNOWN PRINCE

"In the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know." St. John, 1:26.

This is a story about a prince, who later became the king of England. At the time this happened he was still a young boy, a boy who liked the sea and ocean very much. He liked fishing and swimming and boating, but best of all he liked a sail boat.

Did any of you boys and girls ever ride in a sail boat? It is great fun. The wind pushes you along over the water. It takes a great deal of skill to know how to set the sails in just the right way.

Well, this prince and his brother went sailing one summer in and around the beautiful bays and rivers of Scotland. They let the wind take them far north into a beautiful bay near Inverness. They decided to take a walk through the highland hills. What wild and lonely paths they walked. How they enjoyed the air and the scenery. But they forgot just how to get back. They became lost. On and on they wandered. It was growing darker and darker, and they were so tired that they had about decided to lie down and wait for morning, when suddenly they saw a light.

They hurried over to the little house where the light was shining and knocked loud and long on the door. At first nobody answered. Then all of a sudden they heard a voice: "Get away from here, or I'll sick the dog on you. Clear out."

There was nothing to do but leave that unfriendly place. Not far away they found another house and these people took them in, gave the boys something to eat and a bed for the night.

Next morning the boys told the people who they were. Like lightning the news went from cottage to cottage. Prince George and his brother the Duke of Clarence had been lost during the night and had stayed with one of the highlanders. Imagine how the man felt who had driven them away. And imagine how happy the people were who took them in. You can be sure that the unfriendly family did not receive any favors from the future king, while the friendly people, the family that took them in and took care of them, did receive many favors and gifts.

Something like that happens to us, boys and girls, at this time of the year. There is a Prince who is far from His home in heaven. He is down here on earth looking for a place to stay. He is looking for a home. He is looking for a heart that will take Him in. That Prince is Jesus. Will any of you say: "Get out of here, or I'll sick the dog on you?" No, we would not even think of doing that. We love our Lord and we want Him to come to our home and to our heart.

Still, there are some boys and girls who drive Jesus away. By committing sin, by doing bad things, you drive Jesus away, you tell Him to get out. How can anyone be that cruel and unkind to Christ. I know you will not be like that. You will be friendly and kind to Him.

When we read the Bible a few minutes ago we read about St. John the

Baptist again. You know what he said? He said: "In the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know." What did he mean by those words? St. John was telling the people who lived at the time of Jesus that the Lord was right there among them, He was right there at the door, but they did not know Jesus, they did not admit Him and let Him in.

There are many boys and girls like that today. Why there are boys and girls who never heard of Jesus. Yes, right here in the United States there are thousands of children who don't know who Jesus is. If they met Jesus on the street they would not know Him. Believe it or not, but there are thousands of people who don't know that Christmas is the birthday of Jesus. Just try to imagine not knowing that. But they don't.

There are millions and millions of men and women who, if they saw a crib, would ask: "What's that? Who is that? Who's that baby? What's the idea of sleeping in a stable?"

They don't know that Jesus was born in a stable and took His naps in a stable, because the people would not let Him come into their houses.

Ask your playmates this question: "Do you know who Jesus is? Do you know why we get presents at Christmas?" Lots of them will say: "I don't know." You tell them, will you? Tell them that Jesus is the Prince of heaven and earth, who came to this earth on the first Christmas to save all of us, and to make all of us truly happy.

Tell them about Holy Communion and how you receive Jesus into your heart, especially on Christmas day.

Above all, don't drive our unknown Prince away by sin. Invite Him by saying your prayers these days better than you ever said them before. Invite Jesus into your heart by trying to be like Him—obedient, kind, helpful at home.

Thank God we know Jesus. Thank God we love Jesus. Thank God we will have Jesus as a guest in the house of our hearts. Amen.



4th Sunday of Advent—THE VOICE IN THE WOODS

"The voice of one crying in the desert, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'" St. Luke, 3:4.

George was what we might call a city boy. He was born and reared in Chicago. One summer he went to visit his uncle on a farm. While he was there he went out to pick raspberries. He had his little pail almost full of the bright, juicy berries, and was about to start for home when a terrible storm blew up. It rained and lightened and thundered. The trees and bushes waved and swished and whistled. George was scared stiff. Where could he hide? He found a hollow oak tree and crawled in. George, remember, was a city boy and he did not know that lightning often strikes high trees.

As he crouched there in the hollow oak he heard a voice: "George, George. Where are you? Come on quick." The boy crawled out of the hollow tree. No sooner did he do so than a flash of lightning hit the tree he had just been in and split it from top to bottom. The ground shook beneath him. A flash of fire danced all around him. He was so scared he couldn't move. But he wasn't hurt a bit. To himself he said: "That was close. Thank God I got out of there. I wonder whose voice that was."

As he said this the voice cried out again: "George, George, do you hear me? Answer, say something." He looked and there was a farm woman with her hands to her mouth calling out for all she was worth.

George ran up to her shouting: "Here I am. What do you want?"

"Oh," the woman exclaimed, "I didn't mean you. Is your name George? I was calling my little boy George who went out to bring in the cows. He must be hiding from the storm somewhere."

"Yes, mam," answered George, "that is my name, too. I'll help you find your boy. You know, lady, you saved my life." He told her what had happened. While he was telling her the lady's own boy came stomping through the brush, a little scared and scratched, but otherwise not hurt a bit.

As they hurried home the farm woman told the city boy that God had used her voice to save him from being struck by lightning and killed. She showed him where his uncle lived.

In that part of the Bible which we read a moment ago we heard about another voice, a voice in the desert, the voice of St. John the Baptist.

Were any of you ever out in a big field or a big woods? And did you ever shout or yell? Didn't it seem as if nobody heard you or nobody was listening? Sometimes you hear an echo—your words come back to you. But most of the time your words just roll away into the air.

That is how St. John felt. He tried to tell the people to get ready for the coming of Jesus, the One who would save them. But very few would listen. "Straighten the path for Christ; smooth the road for Christ," he cried. But very few paid any attention.

That is the way I feel sometimes right in this church. Sometimes I feel

that I am out in the woods or in the desert, shouting my lungs out for people to get ready because Jesus is coming. Even though this church is filled with men and women, boys and girls, I feel that many do not listen or get ready. I hope you children will not make me feel like that. I hope you will listen as I tell you to get ready for a visit from our Lord. I hope you will think about what I tell you, and what every priest tells you.

What would have happened if George had not listened to the woman calling out his name? He would have stayed right where he was in the hollow tree and would have been burned to death by the lightning. God used that farm lady's voice to tell George there was danger, to warn him to come out and to save him.

In the same way God uses the voice of your priest to tell you what God wants. God also uses the voice of your parents. They take the place of God in showing you what to do and how to do it. When mother and dad warn you against certain bad companions or bad shows or bad words, they are doing God's work. They are talking for God and in God's place. When they tell you to say your prayers, and to go to bed early, and to study your lessons and to get to church and school on time, they are telling you what God wants you to do.

In the same way God uses the voice of your teacher to tell you what He wants. When Sister in school tells you about being neat in your work and honest in your examinations, she is telling you what God wants. When she asks you to be kind to the other pupils, when she asks you to be quiet and polite not only in school but also outside of school, she is asking you to do what God wants you to do.

You see, boys and girls, God uses the voices of many people to help you. Like little George listen to those voices. Answer right away. Act right away. That is how George was saved from lightning. And that is how each one of you will help to make ready the way of the Lord. That is how you will straighten His paths and smooth the road so that Jesus can come to every one of you on Christmas day. Amen.



CHRISTMAS—A GRASSHOPPER AND A BABY

"There has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." St. Luke, 2:12.

"They found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger." St. Luke, 2:16 (Second Mass).

Did you ever chase a grasshopper? How they jump, now this way, now that way. Sometimes they take a short hop and then a big, long hop. I want to tell you about a little boy who was chasing a grasshopper and found a baby. Yes, you heard me right—he found a baby.

This little lad was coming home from school along a country road. It was summer and there were plenty of grasshoppers jumping around. He started to chase one of them. The grasshopper was fast but the little boy was faster. He was gaining, when all of a sudden the hopper hopped over a fence. Quickly the boy crawled under and started again to chase his jumping friend. But he stopped short, because lying near the fence he saw a heap of clothes and out of the clothes there peeked the face of a little baby. He wasn't crying. He just looked at the boy as much as to say: "Where were you all the time?"

The lad picked up the baby and carried him home, forgetting all about the grasshopper. Nobody knew where the baby came from or where he belonged or what his name was. He was adopted into the home of the little boy and became his little brother.

The fence-corner baby grew up to be a great and good man. He became rich and smart and did many wonderful things for his country, England. He is known in history as Sir Thomas Gresham.

Should you ever go to London, England, you will find right in the middle of that great city a big building called the Royal Exchange. On the tip top of that building you will see, not a cross, or a rooster or a lightning rod, but you will see a grasshopper made out of iron. The grasshopper tells the story of how God made a grasshopper guide a little boy to a little lost baby.

Today you and I are going to find another Baby, the best Baby, the most beautiful, the most wonderful Baby that was ever born. God guides us to this Baby. He does not use a grasshopper or a butterfly or anything else like that to show us where this Baby is. God uses angels to show us where Jesus is. God uses a star to show us the way to the Christ-Child. God uses the church bells and the church steeple and the church lights to tell us where the Infant Lord is to be found.

God tells His angels to go and sing: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will." St. Luke, 2:14. And they invite us to come with the shepherds and adore. The little boy I told you about followed the grasshopper not knowing that he was going to find a baby. But you and I follow the star and the angels, knowing that the star and the angels and the singing lead us to a Baby who wants us to find Him and love Him.

Many of you boys and girls are thinking of the presents you received today. You can't wait until you get home to try out that train or that wagon or that bicycle. You girls want to put your dolly in her new buggy and take her for a ride.

All these gifts and presents should lead us to Jesus. That little toy of a jumping man which you wind up and which hops all over the floor, is like the grasshopper of my story. Every one of your toys should lead you to the Baby Jesus. How? Every toy makes you think about Him. Unless Jesus had been born you would not have any Christmas at all. If Jesus had not been born you would not have presents and gifts and good things to eat.

Do you know that there are thousands, millions of boys and girls in the world who do not receive one single present today? Not even one toy or one piece of candy. Why? Because they and their parents know nothing about Christ coming into the world. To them this day is just like any other day.

Be sure, then, to thank Jesus for the gifts you have received. Be sure to thank Jesus and tell Him you are glad that He is coming into the world again to make everyone happy, to bring peace and joy to the world. Be sure to thank Jesus especially for the joy of receiving Him into your heart today in Holy Communion. Be sure, oh, be sure, boys and girls, to go over to the crib and tell Him that you are glad He is here. Then yours will be a Merry Christmas. Merry, merry Christmas to every one of you. Amen.

