

# Feast of Tabernacles Cruise and the Blessing of Little Children.

Sermonette by Robert Schmid

November 1989

Well, from what I have heard so far, it sounds like everybody had a successful and inspiring Feast of Tabernacles. As most of you know my wife and I, Alice Dugan and Harold Barksdale were able to attend the feast in Greece and Turkey on board the cruise ship "Oceanos".

This was obviously a first for the Church of God to have about 600 brethren from 14 different nations, from around the world, assembled for 7 days in the relatively small space of a ship. In a way it's like everybody staying at a hotel, with the obvious difference that the scenery is changing hour by hour as the ship sails from port to port.

And so after leaving Athens, Greece in the afternoon of Oct. 13 we found ourselves in Istanbul, Turkey by the end of the first holy day. Next we visited the ancient city of Ephesus. Definitely a highlight of the trip. Ephesus is restored to an incredible degree. We walked down the original marble streets that Paul must have walked on during his 3 year stay in Ephesus. There are identifiable buildings left and right, the library, the theater and of course the many temples that clearly identify the city, even in its ruins, as the idolatrous city that it was. And yet in spite of this Paul raised up a church there, preaching that Jesus is the Christ, the only true God to be worshipped.

From Ephesus we sailed to the Islands of Patmos and Mykonos. In Patmos we visited of course the precise spot, at least so they claim, where John received the book of Revelation from God. A monastery and shrine has been built around the spot and millions of people come there to worship. The primary beneficiaries of all this activity are of course the merchants.

From Mykonos we sailed through troubled waters to the isle of Rhodes and Crete. When the dishes began to fall and the waiters acted like drunks, the captain exercised his authority and inquired as to who might be the sinful person causing all the turmoil in the waters. Well, the captain was of course immediately informed that it was unlikely that there were any sinners among the passengers and that the problem must therefore be among the crew. Well, I don't know how many they threw over board, but the waters became calm again and the people retained their food again, and we sailed happily into the sunset, well actually into the harbor of Santorini.

Santorini is a beautiful island with cities built high into the cliffs, its whitewashed houses being seen for miles. It's quite indescribable and something you have to see for yourself .

On the 7th day we returned to Athens for the Last Great Day and a visit to ancient Corinth. In Athens we stood on Mars Hill where Paul preached his famous sermon about the "Unknown God", proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ. Proclaiming that Jesus was God and he did it right at the foot of the Acropolis, the temple of the goddess Athena. That took a little courage and a lot of help from God.

Now the obvious question: Should you keep the Feast of Tabernacles on a cruise ship next year? Well, yes, it is a wonderful experience. However, keep in mind that it is physically demanding, and sea sickness is not a pleasant experience. Also keep in mind that ships can be a dangerous place for children. They can never be left alone and require constant supervision by their parents. The lengthy trips through ancient cities and museums are of little interest to smaller children. So keep that in mind when you plan for next years feast. Don't just think of yourself. Keep your children in mind as well.

This leads me to the primary purpose of this sermonette for this is a very special day indeed. This is the day when traditionally the blessing of little children takes place in all the congregations around the world. This day was initiated by Herbert W. Armstrong many years ago, based on the example that Jesus Christ gave to us. The account is given to us in 3 gospels, Matt., Mark and Luke. Let's read it in Matt. 19 beginning with vs. 13:.....

*"Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' And he laid his hands on them and went away."*

What is the significance of this event and why does the Church of God continue to pray over and lay hands on little children? Well, today we live in a society where being rich means having money, gold, stocks or real estate, but there was a time when being rich meant having many children. Children are after all our most precious resource. How do you possibly compare a million Dollars with a potential future God. The two simply can not be compared and yet life and especially the life of little children has become so cheap that if they don't fit into our plans, or if they are not the right sex we simply abort them. Millions of them!

I don't have to elaborate on the incredible child abuse and child neglect that is so prevalent in our society today. What would Jesus Christ say to such conditions if He would be on earth today? There are 299 references to children in the Bible. If there is one thing we can learn from all these scriptures it is that Jesus Christ loves children, in fact, He loves children so much that He would not even allow His disciple to interfere when they were brought to Him. That ought to tell us something. It tells us that we must be extremely careful not to interfere, not to become a stumbling block for a child that wants to come to Jesus Christ.

That is why parents bring their little children before God today and publicly, through the laying on of hands by the Ministry, ask God to bless the child, to dedicate the child to God, to ask for God's protection and to let God know that as a parent you will do everything in your power to bring the children to Jesus Christ and not hinder them to come to Him.

It's a great responsibility and a powerful role that parents play because Christ tells us plainly in I. Cor. 7:14 that the reason why your children are holy before God is because you are a believer. Now, why does the Kingdom belong to little children? Clearly the attribute God is looking for is not young age and small size, but the attitude of a little child and the innocence and complete trust that only small children have toward their parents. But, there is another attribute that little children have, and that is that they grow. Yes, little children grow and that is what Jesus Christ wants us to do.

Do you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? Many of you have been in the Church for many years. Do you still grow? If you do, then yours is the Kingdom of God. If you don't grow, then you are in danger of losing out on the Kingdom of God. That's the clear message. That's the challenge to all of us: **Grow or die!**

We all understand that we as parents must teach our children, but do we understand that we must also learn from our children, that we must become as our children in order to inherit the Kingdom of God?

Obviously we ought to pray for our children daily, but especially on this day, let's pray and thank God for our children, and the children of the whole world.

Let's also be mindful on this day for the great love Jesus Christ has for little children, and then let this remind us that we are all God's little children and that He loves us all very, very much.