

“Let the children come to me,
and do not hinder them.”

Mt. 19:14



Hope for the Third Millennium

Teaching Children to Adore Christ

by Fr. Antoine Thomas and Sandy Rongish

Children of Hope is an apostolate devoted to promoting Eucharistic adoration by children. In this article, Fr. Antoine Thomas and Sandy Rongish share their stories of how they became involved with this apostolate.

Father Antoine's story

Children's adoration for me began back in 1994, when one afternoon after our community's daily holy hour, a mother with two children approached me and asked me to teach her children to adore Jesus like we did in the holy hour. I began to adore Jesus with the children gathered informally around me for about 15 minutes at a time. I noticed right away that these children had a deep faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. I sensed that there were no impediments in them—no doubts, fears, or regrets—the things that sometimes get in the way for adults. Children are so open to the love of Jesus, and they have so much love to give Him in return! How it must please the heart of Our Savior to have them kneeling at His feet in such an act of adoration!

Ten years ago, when I arrived in the United States, I felt strongly urged by Our Lord to continue offering to young children this special way of discovering the loving presence of Jesus in the Blessed



Sacrament. It seemed to me that the words of Jesus, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them” (Mt. 19:14), were not being heard by adults. I recalled that the angel of Fatima, in his apparition to the three children in 1916, had taught Lucia, Francesco, and Jacinta to adore Our Lord present in the Eucharist, and asked them to make acts of Eucharistic reparation. And now, with our apostolate, many children are rediscovering that prayer of adoration taught by the angel: “I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you, and I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love you.”

I also found that Jesus gave this same message in the Novena of Divine Mercy to St. Faustina. On the sixth day He revealed how He received comfort and strength during His bitter agony: He looked ahead throughout the ages and saw all the children who would adore Him. This gave me such hope for the future of the Church! These children indeed have a mission! They are “Children of Hope”! Jesus told St. Faustina, “Today bring to Me the meek and humble souls and the souls of little children, and immerse them in My mercy. These souls most closely resemble My Heart. They strengthened Me during My bitter agony. I saw them as

earthly angels, who will keep vigil at My altars. I pour out upon them whole torrents of grace. I favor humble souls with My confidence.”

I began leading a group of children each week at St. Mark's Parish in Peoria, Illinois, shortly after I arrived there. We prayed each week for the students of Bradley University, of which I was a chaplain. I witnessed many positive changes in these children over time. Those who previously had only the experience of weekly attendance at Mass discovered that the Host is actually the Person of Jesus, mysteriously hidden. They developed a greater interest in the mysteries of our Faith and the liturgy of the Mass. They understood, more than other children of their age who have not experienced Eucharistic adoration, the relationship between the gift of the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross out of love for mankind. They become much more aware of the various degrees of sin and seem very eager to receive the Sacrament of Confession often. The families accompanying their children witnessed a growing desire for peace and forgiveness within the family.

Sandy's story

The Marian Year of 1996 was the beginning of the Church's preparation for the new millennium, and we were to dedicate ourselves that first year to Mary asking Our Mother to help us begin the journey. This was also a year of big changes for me. During this year I experienced a *metanoia*, a turning from the way I had been going and setting my feet on a new path of rediscovering the faith I had known as a child. I soon discovered the joy and peace of spending time before Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. We had had perpetual adoration in my parish for ten years, but I had never gone. Now a change was taking place within me. A desire was growing within me to spend silent time in prayer—what an awesome gift!

My first holy hour was full of grace and consolation. I came to believe in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, that I really was with Him! He loved me! It was the beginning of my love of adoration, my time with Him. I wanted to invite everyone to

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come to the chapel—to know this joy and peace. I especially began to feel a strong desire to bring children to be with Jesus. I wished that I had discovered the Real Presence of Jesus while I was a child.

How could I have received so many Communions and not have realized what I received? *Whom* I received? I began to bring my own children with me and they too came to love their silent time with Jesus, but a strong desire continued within me that I should bring our parish children as well. I didn't know where to begin. During my holy hour I would have little nudges from Our Lord, thoughts and ideas, but I still resisted. In February of 2000, Providence brought me an answer. I met Fr. Antoine at a Youth 2000 teen prayer festival. He began to tell me about “Children of Hope.” I knew in an instant this was the answer to my prayers!

Fr. Antoine taught me the why's and how's to leading a children's holy hour. He shared his instructional video, taught me the format, and gave me endless amounts of encouragement! I asked for permission from my pastor at St. Francis of Assisi parish and soon we began. The results surpassed my dreams!

At the end of our first holy hour, a six-year-old boy asked his mother, “Can we stay a little longer, Mommy? I'm not finished talking to Jesus.” That was all I needed to hear to know that this was a good thing and that it would succeed! Occasionally my 11-year-old son, Kenny, has grumbled about going to holy hour. But one week later he said to me, “Mom, how come I sometimes don't feel like going, but then I'm always glad I went?” I must have had a huge smile on my face when I told him that he had learned early on one of the secrets of the spiritual life. I told him, “The world tempts us with distractions

like television and video games, but if we keep going to the holy hours, graces flowing from the Eucharist warm our hearts and souls and fill us with the true happiness that is only found with God.” Kenny smiled back at me and said, “Yes!”

As a result of these fruits, I found such a joy in these holy hours, and I wanted to help share it with others. Fr. Antoine and I started working on an instruction manual, prayer booklets and other materials to help people with this same desire to start these programs in their own parishes. Now the program is spreading. In the Diocese of Wichita, Kansas, there are now seven groups that meet weekly and many Catholic schools that now have adoration either weekly or monthly.

We are hearing similar things from parishes all over the United States and other countries as well. With the number of materials we have sent out, we can only guess that there are hundreds of groups out there now. This response has been absolutely overwhelming. It is far beyond any expectation we had!

How can we adults not be highly concerned with the great responsibility God entrusts to us to help our children discover His loving Presence among them? Should we have our children wait until the age of their First Holy Communion to receive Jesus in their heart? Don't we recall how our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, strongly urged us to form the hearts of our children? In 1994 in his letter to the children of the world he wrote:

“How important children are in the eyes of Jesus . . . For how many children in the history of the Church has the Eucharist been a source of spiritual strength, sometimes even heroic strength!”

continued on p. 38 . . .

We would like to end this testimony by letting the children speak for themselves and witness to you about their experience of adoration; you'll see how these little souls are receptive to the Holy Spirit much more than we adults sometimes imagine! Here are a few examples in their own words:

- “Before, in my daily life, I didn’t take much time to just look at Jesus. Now I can reflect and be thankful that Jesus died for us. I am more God-centered now.”
- “Thank you for giving me and my family children’s adoration. When you first started the program, I didn’t really like going back to church on Sunday afternoon. Now, it’s the highlight of my week”
- “At adoration, since there is silence, we feel closer to God. I learned that Jesus never leaves us no matter what.”
- “I think that adoration was an amazing religious experi-

ence, and it has taught me that Jesus is the most important Person in my life.”


When we hear these testimonies by hundreds of children throughout the U.S., we should all be encouraged to spread children’s adoration everywhere in the world! These children truly are our hope for the third millennium! ■

Father Antoine Thomas, F.J., is a native of France and a brother in the Community of St. John. After being transferred to the United States, Fr. Thomas developed Children of Hope, a program that promotes adoration of the Blessed Sacrament by children. Mrs. Sandy Rongish is an oblate of the Community of St. John and works with Fr. Thomas developing and spreading children’s adoration. For more information on this apostolate or to learn how to start children’s holy hours in your parish, visit www.childrenofhope.org.


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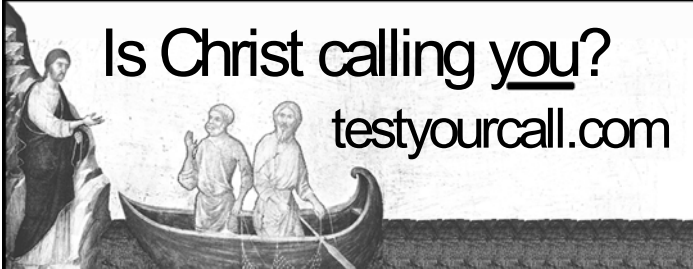


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