

You'll be glad to know I've now reached p150 of Ian McGilchrist's immense volume "The Master and his Emissary" with only another 350 pages to go, barring footnotes. It's a volume detailing how the left and right hemispheres of the brain are related and how each has a different take on the world. Both are needed but the right hemisphere's ability to see the whole, to have a broader perspective, is easily subverted by the left hemisphere's ability to focus on the details. He describes the left hemisphere as having a centrifugal tendency – it's good at taking things apart, isolating one thing from another, and has a drive towards establishing objective "facts" and towards manipulation. The right hemisphere in contrast has a centripetal tendency that is "towards the sense of connectedness of things, and therefore towards engagement with the world, towards a relationship of "betweenedness" with whatever lies outside the self", (p128) that is towards empathy. Now I find this hugely suggestive of the relationship of the Pharisees towards the world, as depicted in today's gospel passage, and that of Jesus. The Pharisees live in the world of "facts", they want things "black and white", this or that. They live in the realm of law and rational thought. There's nothing wrong with this – it's their job, but it's incomplete. It takes the world apart but doesn't put it back together. It needs the perspective of Jesus to bring it down to earth again, to relate it to lived experience (there's a whole take on the meaning of incarnation there and the irony that it's the Pharisees who have their heads in the clouds and not Jesus). And Jesus demonstrates this by taking children as an example and, in his innocence even touching them. The point being that the children and Jesus haven't yet developed a left hemisphere tendency which subverts that of the right but are open to reality as it is, they live and respond to the immediacy of things including people. This is the innocence of transparency, spontaneity, trust. You can see what we have lost since childhood and the need now for laws to regulate our affairs because we have been so unteachable. What Jesus is doing is offering the Pharisees, and us, a wider perspective, a more original take on reality, a way back to the garden or kingdom where God reigns, where the emissary serves the master and not the other way around. Jesus does this by becoming one like us in all things but sin. He suffers our divided humanity in order to make us whole, in order to restore it not only to God but to restore each of us to one another. "It's not good that man should be alone."

Br John Mayhead

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