

When my son Micah was just a little over a year old, maybe a year and a half, one night—upon coming home from a day of CGS Level 1 formation—I had the radical idea that maybe I should start praying with him. I had been reading about the child’s innate relationship with God that longed to have space to express itself, but I wasn’t sure yet whether I believed it. So I sat down on his mattress on the floor as he lay down to go to sleep at night and I said to him, “Micah, is there anything you’d like to say to Jesus before you go to sleep tonight?” Now, mind you the kid hardly spoke more than 20 words at this point and I wasn’t sure he was even going to know what I was talking about. But, he just kind of looked beyond me and said—very clearly and very intentionally—“Alleluia.”

“Alleluia,” the first prayer of a child.

I was quite stunned at the time, but now I think it shouldn’t have surprised me. For when we listen to language as it first emerges from the mouths of babes—if we listen very carefully—we will hear the primordial words of our faith.

The earliest words are always the most important, and so it begins with the joyful “Ababababababa” for hours on end while rolling across the living room floor. In the exercising of the tongue, the most intimate name for God that we have known in human history, the one which we waited centuries for—the one that flowed off of Jesus’ tongue—naturally rolls off the lips of the five month old.

And it is only a matter of time—and a few consonants—until we hear “allelulelele” over and over again. From God’s name to God’s praise. Are these words created by us? Or are we created for these words? Have we chosen them to address God, or have they chosen us? So close to our hearts, so close to our origins, are these words that it seems predestined that in our mastery of human language we should need to utter them.

Alleluia, the primordial expression of praise. The first prayer of all of us.

Every Easter season since then, I have found myself pausing to remember this mustard seed moment with my son and lifting up again this precious word, “Alleluia.”

Each Lent the word is buried like a seed. Not as a punishment—though it may feel like that on Ash Wednesday—but so that in abstinence, our heart may remember our fondness, our natural inclination for the word that springs from our innermost being and rolls from our lips. We bury it like a seed so that it might grow. So that the spirit of praise will take root again in our lives and blossom with the Spring.

We bury it like a seed so that at the crack of dawn forty days later, we will recognize it once again as the *first* song of an Easter people.

*- Ann Garrido, adapted from a reflection first written in 1999*



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