



Come and See!

Week of November 22, 2020

The Word...

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?
When did we see you a stranger and welcome you,
or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?”
(from Mt 25:31-46)

Pondering the Word...

How many times have we heard this gospel preached? How many times have we been admonished to see the face of Christ in the hungry, the stranger, the ill, the naked? But let's take a deeper look, shall we?

The sheep and the goats ask the same question: “*Lord, when did we see you?*” The goats didn't see Jesus in the neglected in their midst, but neither did the sheep. It wasn't Jesus the goats ignored and the sheep tended to. It was a human person -- likely a wounded human person -- who was in need.

The world would be an infinitely better place if we would all see Christ in everyone we meet, but in her article, “*Seeing and Being the Face of Christ,*” author Jan Vallone, raises another way of thinking about this:

“*Seeing the face of Christ*” ... (these words) seem to urge us to pretend that everyone is Jesus... And the implication seems to be that by engaging in this delusion we'll be able to quash the aversion we feel for certain people—the dirty, the diseased, the murderous, the destitute—so we can attend to their needs: I'm not feeding an unwashed, homeless addict: I am feeding Jesus Christ.

Doing so, however, is the opposite of all Jesus did. Part of Jesus's genius was his ability to love others as they were and to see their goodness, beauty, and value in spite of the imperfections, unattractiveness, and worthlessness that other people saw. ...Jesus called each person by name, counted the hairs on every head, saw each person as a mix of good and bad, ugliness and beauty, weaknesses and strengths. And Jesus dignified everyone. That's the treatment we all want. That's the treatment we all need.

Please don't love me because you love Jesus. Please love me for who I am... We must “be the face” of Christ by doing as Jesus did: We must see the face—the real face—of every individual we meet.

(<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/goodletters/2014/11/seeing-and-being-the-face-of-christ/>)

Living the Word...

In his recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis advises us to see Christ in others—it's good advice of course, but he offers another thought from his chapter on the Good Samaritan, one that speaks to this idea of being Christ to others: “*The Samaritan became a neighbour to the wounded Judean.... Jesus concludes the parable by saying: “Go and do likewise” ... he challenges us to put aside all differences and, in the face of suffering, to draw near to others with no questions asked. I should no longer say that I have neighbours to help, but that I must myself be a neighbour to others.*” ((81) As Jan Vallone says in her article, being Christ is a much harder challenge than seeing Christ, but it is what God asks of each of us. Reflect on this subtle, but essential nuance during the difficult days ahead.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

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Mon, Nov 23: *"These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes."* (Rv 14:1-3, 4b-5)

"Gosh, and you know how that Lamb can be! Always wandering off into the brambles. Roaming amid danger and things that could harm him. So trusting, so reliant on God, the Shepherd to be there for him." It can be hard to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Where are you most challenged in your efforts to follow the Lamb?

Tues, Nov 24: *"See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he...,'"* (Lk 21: 5-11)

You've read, I'm sure, about charismatic leaders who deceive their followers. How are we to know? I rely on Matthew 7:16: *"By their fruits you will know them."* Are their fruits bitter and angry or sweet and nourishing? Do they preach prejudice or violence, or are they welcoming and kind? Do their lives reflect the gospel they espouse? Jesus tells us to be cautious. Good advice and a good example to set for others, especially the young.

Wed, Nov 25: *"Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute...You will be hated by all because of my name."* (Lk 21:12-19)

This passage is difficult these days when people who stand diametrically opposed to one another both claim to have the truth, both thinking that "their side" is the one being attacked and hated because of Jesus' name. It's strange: when Christians take sides and set up camps and battle each other with words or worse, neither side has the right to invoke Jesus' name. The wisdom Jesus imparts is love and truth. Think about how you might speak words of wisdom and be the face of love for those on the "other side."

Thu, Nov 26: *"People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world."* (Lk 21:20-28) *"Know that the LORD is God; he made us, his we are; his people, the flock he tends. Enter his gates with thanksgiving."* (Ps 100)

This is a very difficult subject but one that should always be brought into the light during times of hardship: there will be people who will choose to "die of fright" by suicide due to financial pressures, the loss of loved ones, and loneliness, especially during the holiday season. It is particularly concerning as so many people find themselves isolated, working from home or unable to be with loved ones. Today is Thanksgiving in the US. There are some among us for whom it will be hard to find something to be thankful for. If that sounds like you, consider praying today's psalm. Know that the Lord is God and trust that you are a cherished member of the flock God tends. Ask God to enlighten you to see the graces hidden in the shadows. Reach out if you are struggling. And amid our scaled-down festivities this holiday season, pay close attention to those within your faith or local communities who are alone and in need of comfort. Make a point to be there for them.

Fri, Nov 27: *"Blessed those whose strength you are! They go from strength to strength."* (Ps 84)

A good follow-up to yesterday's reflection. Imagine yourself going from strength to strength, like hopping on stepping stones that God has placed as you navigate your way over the still waters and the rapids of your life. It takes trust and faith to believe the next stepping stone of strength will be there, but God will not fail you. Try to look back at times of consolation when God has helped you get your footing, even if you seem to slip and fall in a lot! And look for opportunities to be a stepping stone of strength for others. *"Each is given a bag of tools; a shapeless mass; a book of rules. And each must make e'er life is flown, a stumbling block or a stepping stone."* (R.L. Sharpe)

Sat, Nov 28: *"Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus."* (1 Cor 16: 22b, see Rev. 22: 20c)

Well, we've made it through another liturgical year, this one being the most challenging in my memory. We've gotten past the apocalyptic language in Revelations and in Luke, frightening images of the end of the world made all too real by images of overcrowded hospital wards and body bags in trucks; of floods and wildfires, destruction wrought by Mother Earth as she strains under the weight of overuse and abuse; of partisan hatred and anger between communities and families; of the ongoing crises of poverty, hunger, racial injustice, and violence. A perfect time to turn our attention...to hope. But not just any hope. Not just platitudes and images of a baby in a manger. We turn now to our great hope, the hope we find in God's willingness to enter into our every pain, our every heartbreak, our every need. This season no doubt will have its difficulties, but it offers us an opportunity to put aside the busyness that normally plagues us this time of year, to allow our hearts to take ample time for preparation. To reflect in deep and prayerful ways what Emmanuel really means. I wish you all a blessed Advent. As always, we will accompany one another with *Provisions for the Journey to Bethlehem* starting tomorrow and running through Epiphany. Be well. Be blessed.