

BEHOLDING HIS HOLY FACE: WHERE SHAME AND GUILT MELT AWAY

Even at my age, I'm a sucker for cute puppies. Whether on television ads or photos, they draw us in by their innocence. When our family puppy arrived in 1970, I was thrilled. But when she felt scared (perhaps because she "knew" that she had misbehaved), Sonya would hide the front half of her little body under the bed, while the back half remained clearly visible to her family! My take away as a six-year old— since she could not see us, she presumed that we could not see her. Hiding one's face is a natural, almost uncontrollable, reaction to shame, embarrassment or fear. Children instinctively shield their faces out of shame. A teenager reaches his or her hand up to the brow to shield the eyes from sight when Mom or Dad says something in public they consider embarrassing, which is pretty much everything! This just happens without forethought.

Modern society attempts to eradicate any sense of guilt or shame, seeing them as societal constructs, undoubtedly fostered by the "imposition" of religious views. Humanistic psychology teaches people to cast off the shackles imposed by objective morality, for the sole criterion for making value judgements lies in the human subject himself. But in reality, "shame" entered the world in the Garden of Eden once Adam and Eve realized their sin. Guilt is simply the state of having committed an offense. Shame is trickier to define, as it is an interior feeling connoting a lack of self-worth due to one's own realization of the effects flowing from our action, including the effects to others. The man arrested for solicitation immediately knows he is guilty. When some municipalities took the added step of publishing mugshots online, they deliberately did so knowing that the men's transgressions would shame and expose them.

Contrast this with our Lord Jesus in the sacred events of Holy Week. The prophecy of Isaiah introduces the figure of the suffering servant who did not shield his face from buffets and spitting. Following a triumphal entry to Jerusalem, the tables quickly turned. Scripture relates in great detail how Jesus underwent the most ignominious death imaginable to the people of his society— crucifixion. "Then they spat in his face and struck him, while some slapped him, saying, 'Prophecy for us, Messiah: who is it that struck you?'" (Matt. 26:67-68). Holy Week invites us to enter into this realm without fear and with humility on account of our sins. He neither shielded his face, (he was innocent), nor did he flee. Even in his greatest agony, the loving gaze from the eyes of our Savior flowed from the Cross.

No priest desires for a parishioner to wallow in shame, because we know how unhealthy that is. People who are ashamed somehow feel that their own self-worth is lessened. And yet, we know that because Jesus died for **our** sins, we feel some shame on account of our collective guilt. And if that guilt motivates us to change our ways (isn't that the very purpose of Lent?), then it serves a most noble purpose. At the same time, we would acknowledge that understood properly, guilt has brought numerous people back to the truth of the faith in order to experience the loving mercy of "God the Father of Mercies." When God has dealt with our guilt, then we in turn must be willing to deal with our shame. No longer ought we to feel a lack of self-worth, because God loved us so much that he sent us His only Son. Far from ashamed, we are in awe.

Guilt differs from shame in a real, though subtle way. When we hear the words "May God grant you pardon and peace and I absolve you..." that ought to be the end of any semblance of shame. Our self-worth has been restored if we allow His grace to touch our hearts. Sadly, it is not. The Evil One plants seed of doubt— "You are no good, you still should be ashamed of yourself." When a struggling individual recently thanked me "for taking time to meet with someone like me," I was absolutely crestfallen. Every human being has dignity before God; every person is a son or daughter of God. It never occurred to me that someone would thank me for meeting "someone like me," because it wrongly implies that some people are of lesser dignity than others.

Holy Week reveals that we are **all in the same boat**, humbled and shamefaced before God on account of our sins. And indeed, we ought to exhibit some modicum of humility and shame. Holy Week teaches each of us about our collective responsibility for Good Friday. Jesus died for **our sins**, mine and yours, not only those of Adam, Eve or Judas. He died for **all of us**. "Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, that her guilt is expiated ..." Isaiah 40:1-4. May we all enter into this most sacred time with receptive hearts, ready to be filled with His love and grace.

An Update from Puerto Rico: Today's second collection for the Cathedral in San Juan, Puerto Rico will be used at the discretion of the Rector for organ and stained-glass window restoration and medicines. I will visit the Cathedral during the Twins and Indians two-game series on April 17-18 to present our gift in the full amount we collect. You may still bring items on Easter Sunday, as they will be shipped during the Easter Octave. The following over the counter medicines are especially needed: **Tylenol, aspirin, other pain killers, flu and cough medicine, diapers and children's sneakers.**

- “You’re fired!” Those would be my words to the “trainer” who administered the steroid Stanozolol to **Twins shortstop Jorge Polanco** in the Dominican Republic. It resulted in an 80-game suspension without pay, costing him \$250,000! For the life of me, I cannot understand why, with this much invested in a starting lineup, the Twins would allow a player to have his own off-season trainer. The Twins were thrown for a loop ten days before the start of the season. Ouch! My prediction will appear next week, but this isn't going to help!
- Stealing the show—I most certainly got a kick out of the chaplain (since the 1990's) to the Men's Basketball team at Loyola-Chicago. **Sr. Jean Delores Schmidt is 98 years-old** and wears her own special Nike sneakers, offering prayers and support to the team. They were efficacious as Loyola won its first two games in the NCAA Tourney, upsetting Miami (FL) and Tennessee (6 and 3 seeds respectively), both much larger universities known for sports excellence.
- Pope Francis visited San Giovanni Rotondo to initiate celebrations in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death on September 23, 1958 of **Saint Padre Pio**. The Capuchin friar was a beloved figure in the Church of Italy and far beyond, and his witness to the power of the confessional in addition to suffering from the pains of the stigmata was exemplary.
- Last Sunday, we began our own commemoration in honor of the 100th anniversary of Archbishop Ireland's death on September 25, 1918. We opened an exhibit both in Hayden Hall and our museum of the life of John Ireland. I thank **Celeste Raspanti** and her faithful crew of volunteers. Well done! It provides a poignant glimpse into his remarkable life.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector