

## Seeing Beneath the Surface

One of my favorite songs by John Lennon is "Crippled Inside," where he sings of how we ultimately can't hide who we are within. Among the lyrics are "You can go to church and sing a hymn; you can judge me by the color of my skin; you can live until you die; one thing you can't hide is when you're crippled inside." How true that is for us all, for the truth eventually comes out. All of us are "crippled inside" in a sense due to original sin and its effects. The question is what do we want to do about it?

There are some who are oblivious to the fact that they are a bully or a gossip, or they are a racist or objectify the human body. Sometimes, these people might appear to be quite in order in life. They may go to church as John Lennon said, or in another part of the song shine their shoes and wear a suit, comb their hair and look quite cute and hide their face behind a smile, but their true nature they may choose to ignore. Indeed over the years I've known a number of people who were in some aspects very devout, but in other aspects quite mean and disruptive in a parish. And, I've know priests too who fit this description as well.

In our Gospel this week, Jesus calls out the Pharisees and scribes who fall into this category. He laments how they obsess over ritual and exterior piety, while paying no attention to how they really are on the inside. As our Lord says, "Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile." (Mark 7:15).

Now, to be sure, all of us are "crippled inside" if you will. But once we recognize that we are all sinners, we also recognize that we are capable of such good - and God can help us to truly grow in grace. All of us can certainly look at things we do that we aren't proud of. The question for us is how do we grow in grace, and use that grace to be no longer crippled inside, but rather fully healthy so we can walk upright into God's kingdom?

The starting point comes from our second reading in the epistle of Saint James, where we are told "all good giving and every perfect gift is from above...He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (Jas. 1:17-18). God's love is there for us to forgive, and to help us learn how to respond to grace.

Second, we remember we are sinners, but so deeply loved by God. Our Alleluia verse this weekend is "The Father willed to give us birth," and God created us for a reason. He knows we sin, but we are forgiven. Remember the last six weeks and the Bread of Life discourse we reflected on through John's 6th chapter. Jesus gives us Himself as food for our journey. So while we may be "crippled inside" to an extent, we do not want to just look at our shortcomings. For there are some who see no wrong, but others who don't see the many good things they do.

Third, we examine our conscience. We look inside our hearts. Our Gospel closes with the words of our Lord: "From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy,

blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.” (Mark 7: 21-23). Remember we examine our conscience and bring our sins to God because He loves us, and wants to make us better. We might not like thinking about these things, but it’s important to look into our hearts and see what is there so we can truly grow.

Fourth, patience. As we try to grow in grace, we will fall a time or two again. Or maybe several thousand times again. Through it all, Jesus is there. Hopefully we continue to learn from our mistakes and grow as people.

And lastly, being present to others to help them grow too. As I mentioned last week in my column, a few days ago we celebrated the feasts of Saint Monica and then Saint Augustine; Monica his mother patiently encouraging and praying for her son who eventually turned things around. This happened through her prayers, but also through her gentle challenging over a number of years. Sometimes it can be uncomfortable, but we need to both receive and give loving guidance if we are going to truly grow. We can’t be afraid to admit when something isn’t right in our lives or we know we need to address something, but also if we truly love someone when we recognize or suspect something may be wrong or notice things that aren’t right, we need to talk to them and journey with them to help them find true spiritual health and happiness.

No, we can’t hide that we are “crippled inside” from God. But remember, when Adam and Eve try to hide, the ultimate response to them is Jesus, God coming back to truly liberate and set them free. So let’s not be afraid to see what’s inside - seeing the good but also the bad and the ugly, and remember the incredible power of God’s grace that can transform us by shining on our shadows.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul