

Though it aired just a few years before I was born, most everyone has seen the famous “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke” commercial where people from all cultures and walks of life are happily singing along to the re-worked “I’d Like To Teach the World to Sing” 70s hit. Reality though tells us that even if you were to buy the world a Coke, there would still be a lot of intense differences and animosity.

Differences are of course not a bad thing; a rainbow needs different colors, and the 64 crayons in the Crayola box all have a unique shade that is important. But differences as we also know can lead to animosity and intense division; some feeling they are superior to others, or don’t belong, or thinking that others don’t belong.

Isabel Martin, who began writing at the age of 57 after teaching high school and middle school for 22 years and writing a number of novels and short stories, once reflected upon this in a short story called “Sisters,” which was of her experience in a Virginia laundromat where those differences were overcome when two people looked past them, and realized they actually had a lot in common and though they each had different stories were in another way united as sisters.

She recalls walking into a coin laundry in Wallops Island, Virginia, and having the sense that she was in the wrong place. She was the only white person. She couldn't leave, because her husband, Dave, had driven away.

She walked down the rows of machines in a vain effort to find an empty one. No one looked at her or spoke to her.

It had been years since she had been in Virginia or any part of the South, where she grew up. Since marriage, she had lived in Minnesota for 30 years. She remembered what the South had been like - places where blacks hung out and whites didn't go, places where whites hung out and blacks didn't go. That had all changed, hadn't it, she thought to herself? Well, not here. She kept walking down the aisles looking for an empty washer.

When they had arrived in town earlier that week, they had been horrified to find that her dad, age 82, was living in squalor. They scrubbed and repaired things in his tiny, rented house. Now, Isabel planned to wash and mend his clothes, and go back to her teaching job. She had begged her dad to find

someone to clean and help take care of him, but she knew he did not want to spend his savings for that. She didn't know how to help him.

She found an available washer, lifted the lid, and stuffed in her dad's clothes that were all stained.

She slumped into one of the few worn chairs and thought about the past few days and her dad. She had never felt so much like a stranger. Besides her husband, she had no one to talk to, no one to guide her. She wanted desperately to take care of her dad, but her family back home needed her. So what could she do, she thought to herself.

A pleasant-looking black woman who was about her age smiled at her. Encouraged, Isabel explained "My dad doesn't know how to take care of his laundry. And he burns holes in everything."

She smiled sympathetically. "My mom, too. I know what you're going through."

Isabel was frantic to talk to someone. "I have to go home to Minnesota tomorrow," she said. "He promised to try to find someone to clean and help take care of him, but I know he won't - especially if it costs him any money."

"My mom, too. They're scared their money won't last," she said. "Someday, we'll be in their shoes."

"I know" Isabel said as she tried not to cry. "Our plane leaves tomorrow. I don't know what to do. If I only knew people in this community, I could find someone." Isabel told her where his place was and that it was far from any town.

"I know where that's at. I go by his house every day," she said.

"He has the money; that isn't the problem. Do you know anyone around there who cleans? It would have to be someone special. He's half-blind and can hardly walk. It won't be long before he'll have to give up and come live with me. Right now, he refuses."

She smiled again. "I clean houses."

Isabel gasped. It was too good to be true.

“I’m Florence,” she said, taking her hand in hers. She agreed to come by her dad’s place after church the next morning to meet him and decide if they could work out some arrangement for her to clean each week. Isabel warned Florence that it could turn into caregiving because of his age and disabilities.

At exactly ten, she drove up with her elderly mother in the front seat and several young children in the back - her grandchildren, she assumed.

“God bless you. God bless you” the old woman waved her hand out the window. “God bless you.”

Florence and Isabel exchanged glances. They both knew exactly what the other was going through. The big difference was, she had her mom there and could take care of her, and Isabel had to leave her dad. Florence talked to Isabel’s dad, and he agreed with their plan to pay Florence each week. They set it all up and exchanged phone numbers and addresses.

Florence and Isabel looked into each other's eyes and knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that if their roles were reversed, Isabel would have taken care of her parent and she would go back to her job.

Over the next few months, Florence not only cleaned Isabel's father's house, but drove him to doctor appointments and shopping. When he finally agreed to come live with Isabel, Florence packed up his usable clothing and keepsakes, and she escorted him to the plane.

She closes her story by reflecting, "See, Florence and I were sisters, and we knew that. God put her in that laundromat knowing I'd talk to her. And none of that black and white stuff had anything to do with it."

Unfortunately for us, the stuff seems to get in the way quite a bit. But we know that this isn't how it's meant to be.

Today as we celebrate Holy Thursday, we celebrate the gift of the Eucharist. This is Jesus' gift to us that is our food for the journey of life. It is spiritual nourishment of His love that removes sin but that also gives us the

love and grace of God. But the Eucharist is also meant to open our eyes to the fact that the love of God is unconditional; it's not based on merit or anything else. Jesus loves Judas just as much as Peter and John and this love is freely given, but the grace is meant to open our eyes too to truly loving one another.

Jesus says it beautifully at the end of the Gospel: "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should do also."

Our challenge here is twofold.

The first, is to remember that Jesus washes the feet of all there, even Judas his betrayer, for He sees them all with the eyes of love. So where is the division in our hearts? Again we all have thoughts that can be quickly judgmental, and having a strong opinion on things like politics or religion is fine and often appropriate. But when we listen to our hearts, do we at some level inside our souls think that some are cut off from the love of God, or

that we are superior to others, or that God plays favorites? It can be so quick to let hate over in our hearts, but the Eucharist is meant to open our eyes to the reality that God's love plays no favorites.

And second, how do we wash one another's feet? In a laundromat years ago in Virginia a woman who was nervous and worried inside was seen by another one who was seemingly very different from her, but so often Christ is hidden in people like the woman in that laundromat. Some years back, Pope Francis visited a former Bishop from Argentina who was asked to step down after he began a relationship with a single mother. He was later married, but at the time of his death no Church official in Argentina visited him or had anything to do with him. He was also very poor. The then cardinal Jorge Bergoglio though reached out to him and spent time with him in the hospital - the only Church official to do so. When we open our eyes, we too can see the deeper needs of the people in our lives who need to be washed with the mercy of God by being the hands and face of Jesus to them.

The Eucharist is such a gift to us, but our hearts also have to be open for grace to take effect. And I think within our universal Church, a number of us



just don't get what the Eucharist means. Sometimes people have no idea that Jesus is actually present, and don't think much about what it is they are receiving. But then there are others who are very reverent, but then have no idea that the theology of the Eucharist is meant to connect us more deeply with one another as well. As we prepare now to receive this precious gift, let's make sure we have a total understanding of all that it entails. Lets make sure the Eucharist opens our eyes to seeing how Jesus loves us, when we are like Isabel in that laundromat feeling isolated and alone and afraid, and opens our eyes as well so that we understand the true meaning of the washing of the feet, recognizing that every day, we have the opportunity to truly help - and hurt - one another through our words and actions, whether they are present next to us or someone we may be talking about. The love of Jesus knows no exceptions. As we welcome Him into our souls, may we strive to truly become who it is we receive, coming to understand the true meaning of the word "love" and applying it to others through or words and actions.