Sometimes looks can be deceiving. On the surface, someone might look to be quite pious like the Pharisee; or someone might look like they don't belong like the tax collector from the Gospel. But as we all know, looks can be deceiving, and what matters isn't how many times other people see you genuflect or do outward signs of piety, but rather what is in the heart. And when we have an attitude of humility; knowing that we are loved by God but that we need God to guide us, along with His Church, and that we are all works in progress. For when we do that, we'll be able to grow and use the gifts that God has given us for His glory, while at the same time seeing the gifts that others have too.

A little over a century ago, Saint Maria Bertilla Boscardin entered eternal life at just the age of 34, dying of cancer, serving as a remarkable nurse who helped many, especially children.

But from an early age, and then for much of her life, it certainly seemed like she could do nothing right; in her own eyes or in the eyes of others.

She never bothered thinking much about herself, no matter how people ridiculed her. She saw herself as clumsy, awkward, and rather unintelligent.

But at the same time, she lived her life with a knowledge that despite the cruelty of so many around her, she was loved by God.

Born to an Italian peasant family, she was called Annetta as a child. Her father was a violent man prone to drunkenness whose outbursts forced Annetta and her mom to flee their home. This childhood hemmed in by fear left Annetta shy and clumsy, always afraid of setting her father off.

School wasn't much better. She was often kept home from school, and this slowed her progress and she had to repeat the first grade. Her struggles with academics combined with her awkwardness made her a target for the other children. They would ridicule her for her slow-wittedness, and nicknamed her Goose.

However, she knew that whatever the other children thought, whatever her father thought, there was a God in heaven who loved her.

Every morning, Annetta would sneak out of her house and run down to the village church to contemplate the Holy Family and imagine what it would be like to live in a home filled with love and peace. Sensing the depth of her

love for the Lord and ignoring her academic difficulties, Annetta's pastor allowed her to receive her First Communion early. But when, at 15, she told him that she wanted to be a nun, he responded coldly: "But you aren't able to do anything! What would the nuns do with you?" She agreed, so aware of her own flaws and certain of God's love that she wasn't hurt by his callous reply.

That night the priest wondered if he had been too hasty. Certainly she might not be the smartest young person he'd met, but he knew she was pious and obedient. When he next saw her, he asked "Do you know how to peel potatoes at least?" She replied eagerly that she could. He said "That will be enough."

She was thrilled, but the sisters were less than thrilled. One order rejected her. Then a second, like the first, sized her up quickly. What could they do with a girl who could manage nothing more than saying "I am ignorant, but I believe in everything the Church believes in?" But at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, they relented. She entered the Sisters of Saint Dorothy, taking the name Sr. Maria Bertila and bluntly telling the mother superior "I'm not good at anything. I'm a poor goose. Will you teach me what I must do? I

want to become a saint.” She wanted holiness so badly that she held nothing back. Her prayer that she wrote down in her journal was that she would die a thousand times rather than do a single thing to be noticed.

She was willing, but still struggled to find her way in the convent. Her superior tried to convince her to return home, certain she would be a burden on the community. When that failed, she sent Sr. Bertilla to the kitchens or the laundry - anywhere but the hospital. She thought Sr. Bertilla would be a disaster there.

But one day the superior found that she had no other options: either Sr. Bertilla went to work as a nurse or the sickest children would have nobody to care for them. Grimacing, she sent the clumsy, awkward sister into a ward filled with critically ill children, where a moment’s delay could cost a life. To everyone’s amazement. Sr. Bertilla was a brilliant nurse. Children who were terrified and full of fear were said to calm down almost instantly before her. Parents took the worst possible news with grace when they heard it from Sister Bertilla. Nervous young doctors drew strength from her. She was kind and calm, and actually amazingly competent in her role as a nurse. When air raids threatened the hospital in World War I, Sr. Bertilla

proved to be courageous as well, staying with the patients who could not be moved.

Her devotion to duty attracted the attention of the authorities of a local military hospital. Unfortunately a jealous superior moved Sr. Bertilla back to the laundry room. But she was still humble, and did not complain at all. Thankfully this lasted just 4 months, when another higher-up superior returned her to the hospital and made her a ward supervisor. Sr. Bertilla served through the war and an epidemic of Spanish Flu, during which she hardly ever left the ward. One night when the boiler blew, she stayed up most of the night tending a fire she had built in the yard, boiling small pots of water and bringing each hot-water bottle up 100 steps to provide some comfort to the sick in the cold ward. Shortly thereafter, Sister Bertilla's already poor health got worse. A painful tumor which she had had for several years had progressed to the point of requiring an operation, which she did not survive. She died in 1922 at just 34 years of age, working as a nurse up to just 5 days before she died.

Even in all of this as she did so much for the patients, some of the sisters like the Pharisee in the Gospel sneered at her, wondering what all the fuss

was about - even as she was dying. Sr. Bertilla even wondered why anyone would care she was dying because her whole life she had been so focused on Jesus that she hadn't realized that she had become a saint.

A memorial plaque placed on her tomb refers to her as "a chosen soul of heroic goodness ... an angelic alleviator of human suffering in this place."Crowds flocked to her first grave. After a tomb was erected for her at Vicenza, it became a pilgrimage site where several miracles of healing were said to have taken place.

In 1961, 39 years after her death, she was canonized as a saint. The crowd in attendance included members of her family as well as some of her patients. Her feast day was this past Monday, October 20th.

Sr. Maria personifies the saying "here I am Lord, I come to do your will," and she got what she wanted - sainthood - because her whole life was focused on Jesus. Such is the challenge for us all, which entails a humility and a not letting pride get in the way. Ultimately what it comes down to is having our lives and desires revolve around God, and not having it be the other way around.

The Gospel has an interesting opening: “Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.” It’s a good thing for us to reflect on too, because how often that can be us as humans. We can tell God what we want and then be angry when we don’t get what we want, or think God has abandoned us. Sometimes parents can push kids too far to be what they want them to be, not what the child wants to actually become or be blind to their gifts. One spouse can be controlling over another. Or, as was the case in Sister Maria’s convent, even people who devoted themselves to God had their wants and desires get in the way with jealousy.

This is where the starting point for us needs to be the attitude of Sr. Maria; an attitude of God, I am a sinner, but I’m trying to become a saint. So here I am Lord. I come before you a sinner, but someone trying to become better. I come before you with plans and desires, but maybe you have different things in mind, so help me to know them Lord and I’ll listen to what you want me to do. It’s where we have a balanced humility in the sense we aren’t so down on ourselves that we’re blind to our gifts or that we are loved, but that we know we all have work to do. It’s why we get a sense of

the sacred in a church by bowing or genuflecting or spending time in prayer; or thinking about how great God is coming to be with us in that little host we receive which is God's love given to us, and try to have this sense of awe of how God is one of us, but also other - and we reverence that by truly trusting in God and letting Him fully into our lives.

Doing that takes work; not only an attitude of prayer, but also of that humility that Sr. Maria had. There is scrupulosity which isn't healthy, but then there is pride too which is also a big problem. The healthy attitude is one where we look at our gifts but also our shortcomings, and own up to them. This is what the tax collector does. Like Sr. Maria, he wants to become a saint. He's sorting it out. He recognizes he needs God. But he lays the cards on the table. That's so important for us to do too. It's not like social media where everyone likes something you post or says way to go good job. It's about becoming better and getting introspective; what is it we battle, what are the things we don't like to think about, where can we really grow as a person? Only by truly listening to our conscience and the voice of God and reaching out to him can we grow. Jesus is indeed our Redeemer, but on our part we need to also have a sense of why we need a redeemer. Big helps in that too are the Church and other people - listening

to the voices in our lives that are the to guide us and challenge us. Sometimes like the child saying “mom why is the emperor not wearing any clothes?” we need people like that too to challenge us about things in our lives we should do differently.

But lastly with that, we must never forget there is so much more to the story than meets the eye. On the one hand no one would pray like the Pharisee in the Gospel, but as humans we can certainly think the exact same thing can’t we? Thank you Lord for not making me like my n’aer do well brother who never comes to Mass save at Christmas and Easter. Thank you Lord for not making me like the others who know nothing of the catechism or who show up late at Mass. There is nothing wrong with outward signs of our faith, but the faith has to have depth - God sees through to the heart, and there is no fooling Him. This should not fill us with fear, but with a desire to be authentic, but also to meet people with judgment for the right reasons - not to gossip about them or to look at them to inflate our egos - like some of the sisters in the convent who looked at Sr. Maria and saw not gifts but someone inferior to themselves - but rather as a son or daughter of God. Take that tax collector. Maybe he had no skills and could do nothing else in society and was just trying to survive (tax collectors stole from what

they took in to make a living). Maybe the Pharisee could have spoken to him, rejoiced that he was at Temple and a friendship could have emerged. So it is with others. We can sometimes just see where a person is at at one moment in time - but for all of us, if the camera were on us all the time how our lives could be easily edited to make us look like the greatest saint ever or the worst person ever. The good news is God loves us. The challenge is to love one another, to see the person within - and hopefully we do that by judging actions to ultimately help our brothers and sisters rather than condemn them.

What ultimately is our life about? Hopefully not getting a statue, or power or control, but about pointing the way to Jesus like John the Baptist, like Sr. Maria, and all the saints. It's not easy when our egos can be quite strong at times and when it's so easy to compare ourselves to others all the time with the use of social media. On the one hand may we never forget how special and precious we are to God and how deep is His love for us, and of the gifts we have; but on the other may we also remember learning how to use those gifts for His glory - not our own - takes a lifetime of work, humbly asking God for His love and forgiveness, listening to His guidance, and

then putting it into practice. May Jesus truly be the center of our lives, for when He is, we will find the true happiness and peace we long for.