

“You’re Beautiful”

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*Transfiguration Sun.*

Exodus 34:29-35

Luke 9:28-43

*Moses came down from Mount Sinai.*

*As he came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand,  
Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly  
because he had been talking with God.*

Exodus 34:29

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to see the beauty in one another  
and claim that beauty for ourselves, too.

Help us to see you through Christ and to see Christ in others  
and recognize them as being worthy of dignity just for being created in your image.

Help us to see our own worth as your children born of your Holy Spirit of love.

Amen

There is a video on the internet made by a high school student as a project  
where she went around saying to classmates and teachers,

“I’m taking pictures of things I find beautiful.”

and if they didn’t quite understand, she would say,

“You’re beautiful”, and they would light up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW8BDgLpZkI>

The results generally were shy smiles,

but there was also an angry suspicious reaction, or no reaction,

or just that they couldn’t believe someone would say such a thing –  
or perhaps they couldn’t believe it was true about them.

I was reminded of when I have done street caricature,

my face would be tired at the end of the afternoon... from smiling.

That was because each time someone sat in front of me,

I would smile to coax them to do the same.

When we smile we are at our most beautiful

and my focus would be on some feature or gift of eyes, mouth, hair  
that was attractive.

So it's true. We're beautiful...

We are transfigured when we smile.

Some people cover their mouths when they smile –

out of shyness or just feeling that to smile is to be vulnerable.

When we smile, we betray the fact that we like something.

So that may not be helpful when you are playing poker

or buying a used car or any time you are bargaining in the marketplace.

Too often in our lives, we have to maintain our street-face –

but we need to find a balance between those times when we have to be serious  
and when we can be gentle.

Willard, p.2

Today is Transfiguration Sunday and it comes at the end of the season of Epiphany which celebrates the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is described as being transformed on that mountaintop – actually, to reveal his true appearance radiant like Moses, cloaked with light, beautiful like a butterfly is revealed from the inside out.

There was a time when I found it hard to see the beauty in people, so I searched for it in pictures of Christ. I am going to show you some of my favorites today – by no means a definitive list, but my hope is this will be a starting point for you to imagine how you visualize Christ.

In my search, I found a book about the Shroud of Turin which is believed to be the burial cloth of Jesus.

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Apart from whether or not the Shroud of Turin is authentic, nobody really knows *what* it is exactly.

It appears to be a rudimentary, photographic negative on fabric, of the actual body of a man that had been crucified and then wrapped in it.

But as to how the cloth came to acquire this image, no one knows, though something like it was said to have existed in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image\\_of\\_Edessa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_of_Edessa)

In this book about the Shroud of Turin, a comparison was made with this icon – which has a rich history...

[Slide 2]

This icon is believed to be one of the most ancient portrayals of Jesus with long hair and a beard.

It was discovered in the 1960s after being plastered over to protect it from the extremists of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century CE who thought such paintings were idolatrous.

This particular icon is called “Christos Pantocratur” which means, “Christ Over All Creation” or “Christ Almighty”.

One of the details I love about this picture is how it demonstrates a principle for drawing portraits – our expressions are simultaneously gentle and serious.

[Slide 3]

You can see this easily the next time you look at a photograph of someone’s face by covering up one side and then the other.

No matter what the overall emotional expression is about, our faces are a blend of serious determination and gentle compassion.

In this ancient icon of Jesus, this same balance is demonstrated, portraying Jesus with the ferocity of a lion and the humility of a lamb.

These two extreme expressions when combined in this image, appear to me as if Jesus is about to smile...

Willard, p.3

[Slide 4]

We are not generally taught that God has a sense of humor,  
but humor can be found in the Bible as an important characteristic of God.  
This is evident to me in another image of Christ painted by the French realist,  
Leon Augustin L'Hermitte as a painting called, "Friend of The Humble".

[Slide 5]

It shows the supper at Emmaus sometime after the Crucifixion,  
when two disciples suddenly realize  
they are at the dinner table with the Resurrected Christ.  
Jesus is not smiling and neither are the two shocked disciples,  
but we can see how humor was used to heal them of their grief and fear,  
to lift them out of despair and into joy.

Though we don't know the exact date when this happened,  
if you wanted to pinpoint the Resurrection as an historical event,  
this image represents one of those moments when the followers of Jesus  
were convinced he had come back from the dead and was alive.

Another aspect of this picture is that the figure of Jesus in this painting  
appears to be the basis for one of the most familiar images of him ever.

[Slide 6]

Salman's "Head of Christ" which became very popular during WWII  
because it was included in servicemen's Bibles.

Another image of Christ that has been an important inspiration to me  
is this one by Frederick Franck which he used to represent Christ  
in the Stations of The Cross.

[Slide 7]

He merged Christian mysticism with that of Buddhism  
by comparing Nicholas of Cusa's concept of 'the Face of faces'  
with Hui Neng's "Original Face".

Though Frederick Franck described this design of a face  
as representing what is 'essentially human' about all people and not just Christ-  
to me, it is one of the most spiritual because of its inclusive simplicity.

For example, this could represent a woman as well as a man.

I found this example of a reverse image of white on black

[Slide 8]

that suggests we should not assume Jesus was white.

like L'Hermitte's Christ at Emmaus or the icon of Pantocratur.

It is important to recognize the humanity of Christ as a balance of our extremes,  
but we need to make room for the divinity of Christ as well.

In the Gospel of John, we are told that Christ is the Word  
and Franck's image is kind of a shorthand version to me for that Word  
that was present with God when Creation began to be –  
just as DNA is written into the genetic material of all living things.

Willard, p.4

This is the One who is the face of God – the mask of God who created everything  
from the one cell amoeba to the galaxy of Andromeda,  
from monarch butterflies to tyrannosaurus rex,  
from purple mountain majesties to fruited plains,  
quarks to black holes,  $E = mc^2$  to string theory,  
the human brain, the human eye, the potential for violins and computers...  
However, the God we meet through Christ does not seem to be content  
to sit enthroned and require the eternal adoration of servants.  
But we have a God who meets us on the level of being one of us  
even the ‘least of these’ – the minority in our midst.

Forensic scientists recently reconstructed a face onto the skull  
of a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Middle Eastern, male adult – just like Jesus was.

[Slide 9]

It is not a very complimentary picture of Christ Almighty,  
but gives us an accurate idea of what Jesus of Nazareth could’ve looked like.  
Jesus was a dark-skinned, sweaty Galilean Jew who did a lot of walking  
and talking and healing in his day.  
He didn’t stay on the mountain-top, but came down to enter the valleys  
of the human predicament to drive out evil spirits of fear, ignorance, & shame.

In our Gospel lesson today, the crowd was terrified  
by the child’s epileptic convulsions, but Jesus was not put off by this.  
Instead, he healed the child and helped them all to see the humanity  
of this young person.

Jesus challenges us still to look for and see him in other people and  
how we are all created in the image of God.

Therefore, we must work to see the beauty of each other as God’s children, too,  
worthy of dignity and deserving respect.

In this world, there is trouble and a new epidemic is going round  
that can leave babies terribly disfigured,  
attacking that part of us which is most ‘essentially human’ –  
our heads and specifically our faces.

[Slide 10]

Yet in this picture there is an example of the love that is possible,  
transfigured by a smile to bring out the beauty and the humor,  
defiant of evil for the sake of human dignity and compassion.

So who do you think is most like Christ in *this* picture?

<http://thegivingofemmaline.blogspot.com/>

I want to close by asking you to do something.

Without getting up, or touching anyone, I ask that you turn to another person  
sitting beside you and tell them, “You’re beautiful...”

Amen

*Our lesson today from Exodus 34:29-35 is about Moses' return to the Hebrew people after 40 days on Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments.*

*This passage describes how talking directly to God had an effect on Moses' physical appearance...*

[29] Moses came down from Mount Sinai.

As he came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand, Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God.

[30] When Aaron and all the Israelites saw the skin of Moses' face shining brightly, they were afraid to come near him.

[31] But Moses called them closer.

So Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and Moses spoke with them.

[32] After that, all the Israelites came near as well, and Moses commanded them everything that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.

[33] When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

[34] Whenever Moses went into the Lord's presence to speak with him, Moses would take the veil off until he came out again.

When Moses came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded,

[35] the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses' face was shining brightly. So Moses would put the veil on his face again until the next time he went in to speak with the Lord.

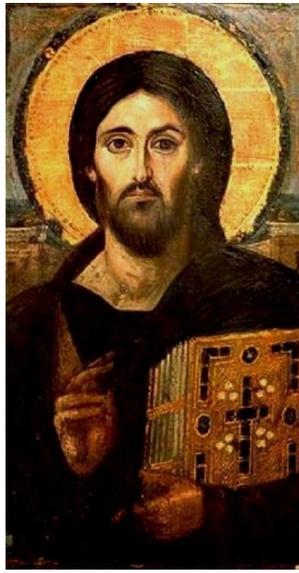
*Let us be guided and challenged by these words...*

Luke 9:28-43

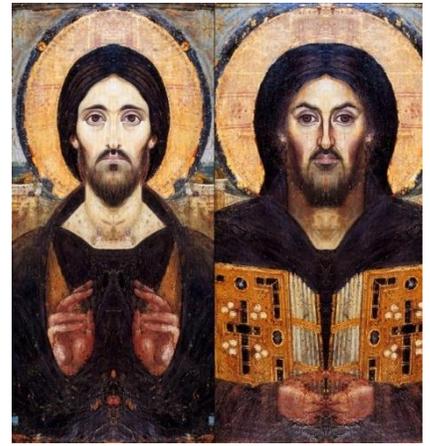
- <sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings  
[Jesus] took with him Peter and John and James,  
and went up on the mountain to pray.
- <sup>29</sup> And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered,  
and his raiment became dazzling white.
- <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Eli'jah,  
<sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure,  
which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.
- <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep,  
and when they wakened they saw his glory  
and the two men who stood with him.
- <sup>33</sup> And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus,  
“Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths,  
one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah”—  
not knowing what he said.
- <sup>34</sup> As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them;  
and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.
- <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying,  
“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”
- <sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.  
And they kept silence and told no one in those days  
anything of what they had seen.
- <sup>37</sup> On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain,  
a great crowd met him.
- <sup>38</sup> And behold, a man from the crowd cried,  
“Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my only child;  
<sup>39</sup> and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out;  
it convulses him till he foams, and shatters him,  
and will hardly leave him.  
<sup>40</sup> And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.”
- <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered,  
“O faithless and perverse generation,  
how long am I to be with you and bear with you?  
Bring your son here.”
- <sup>42</sup> While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him.  
But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy,  
and gave him back to his father.
- <sup>43a</sup> And all were astonished at the majesty of God.



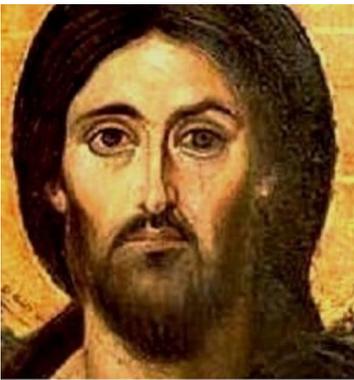
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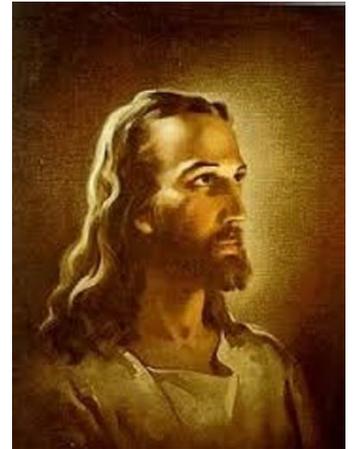
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