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Second Sunday of Lent

Ed Hays | Mar. 6, 2009

Pharmacies or drug stores have entire departments devoted exclusively to one of the oldest of all healing medicines ? cosmetics! In Egypt, over 8,000 years ago, these cures included a variety of skin creams and oils, rouges for cheeks, and coloring tints for skin, lips and hair ? for use by the living and for the dead.

"Cosmetics," which comes from the Greek word for "skilled in decorating," are medicines designed to treat the disease of aging and that equally ancient affliction of not being beautiful enough. These disguising ointments attempt to restore what time has stolen: youthfulness, sexual vigor, flesh tone, and hair.

In ancient times, men used cosmetic cures for hair more than women did. One prescription for male baldness was a paste of crushed myrtle berries and bear grease. Graying hair was treated by wearing a paste of herbs and earthworms overnight. While dark or black hair was common in Mediterranean societies, blond hair was considered more beautiful because it was associated with Greek heroes like Achilles. The prescription for golden blond hair was to use yellow flower pollen, yellow flour, and even fine gold dust or bleaches from Phoenicia.

To our knowledge, Jesus of Nazareth didn?t use cosmetics, yet he could have since he was relatively old when he began his public ministry at about the age of thirty. Jesus was likely older than his disciples and the majority of those who encountered him because in Palestine at that time 75 percent of the population died by their mid-twenties. Those who lived beyond that age commonly suffered from tooth loss and a variety of diseases. By the age of 40, 90 percent were dead.

So the Jesus who climbed that high mountain could well have been an aged, wrinkled, graying man, yet he was transfigured more gloriously than a youthful, golden-haired Greek god-hero. Is the transfiguration that we hear about in today?s gospel **(Mark 9:2-10)** [1] just a preview of the heavenly glory that we shall share with the

Risen Christ, or does it have some personal meaning for this life?

Everyone suffers from the effects of aging, and while cosmetics can hide and reduce these effects, is there another art or "skill in decorating"? Lent is a cosmetic season to beautify not only the outside but also the inside.

Our Lenten practices are intended to allow what is inside to radiate outward, as Jesus did when he became the transparent, see-through Christ. But, you object, he was the Son of God! True, but does not the glorious image of God also reside in you? Perhaps like dull, old silver, the image has lost its luster ? tarnished by neglect, sins, and human frailties. Prayer polishes the soul and a habitual desire for inner beauty causes your soul to surface splendidly on your face in a radiant smile. Your transfiguration into the glorious Christ need not be delayed until death. Simply begin today to think, to speak, and to act as he did.

-- from *The Lenten Pharmacy* by Fr. Ed Hays

Prayer:

Your cross, Lord Jesus,
confronts the camouflaged evil
of those piously masked groups and persons
who quote scripture to justify their injustices
and try to baptize as Godly their unclean desires.
Your cross exposes the agents of evil,
who condemned your disciples in every age.

Risen Christ living in us,
you must shudder as we break
our own baptismal vow to reject Satan
by engaging in the vice of judging others
and spreading the poisonous evil of unkind gossip.
Inspire us to renew our baptismal promises
and so reject evil by abstaining from false judgement. Amen

This week's mantra:
May I choose the uphill road that leads to life
and never abandon the Way of the Cross.

? prayer and mantra from *The Pilgrimage Way of the Cross* by Fr. Ed Hays

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