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The face of Christ in the checkout line

Michael Leach | Dec. 20, 2011 Soul Seeing

When I was in my 20s I glimpsed the truth that we all wear the face of Christ in a unique way and that what we do unto anyone else we literally do unto ourselves. I?ve spent the rest of my life trying to remember that. Here are some things that help make it a habit.

1. *The supermarket checkout*. When standing in line at the checkout I remind myself that the individual in front of me is the Christ and that the injunction to love her as I love myself is literally true. A little miracle happens: I not only love her but like her, and if her credit card is no good or her kohlrabi doesn?t register, I don?t get mad. By the time it is my turn to chat with the dark-eyed checkout girl from Nicaragua I am madly in love.

2. *The office visit*. Despite a life of good intentions, workers who busted into my office with problems when I was busy doing my own work used to tax my patience. I mentioned this to Henri Nouwen who said, ?Those people are your work.? I never forgot that.

3. *The phone call*. I told myself a long time ago to pause a moment before picking up the phone and remember that it was the voice of Christ calling (see No. 1). This worked beautifully for most of my work life (one author said, ?Every time Mike picks up the phone you feel like he?s been waiting his whole life just to talk to you? -- that?s how you feel when you really know it?s the Christ on the line) until I semiretired and just about every time I picked up the phone it was a telemarketer who wouldn?t let go of my ear. That wore on my patience until a friend told me that my favorite spiritual teacher, Dr. Thomas Hora, had this telephone maxim: ?Before you say hello, say I love you.? Now I don?t always say that to myself before I pick up the phone (or before someone I am calling picks up their phone) and I only sometimes remember that is the voice of Christ on the other end, but I am discovering that both of these practices are beneficial habits that put me in my proper place. Even with a telemarketer.

4. *The news watch*. Children without food, families who forage through the ruins of their homes, old people who triage their medicines, and blathering pundits who do nothing but blame. Watching the news on TV is like swallowing a bucket of downers. Is there a way to watch the news with our soul? Jesus taught us how. ?My peace I give you, my peace I leave unto you? (John 14:27). We are all one spiritual body. Any member can literally give another member her peace, across space and time, and the peace of both will increase and multiply. We can watch the news and close our eyes and ask God for peace and give that peace to someone else. When

we give our peace to someone far away we experience a peace that is beyond understanding.

5. *The walk*. Everyone knows that when we smile at a stranger and say hello, the stranger smiles back and says hello, and we are strangers no more. I know we could also get killed that way but, hey, life is a risk and how joyful it is to walk around with the realization that the stranger walking his pit bull in the park is not a threat but an aspect of the same Christ we are. What we give, we get right back. Dogs teach us that, too.

Now, do I practice these ways of ?praying always? always? I?m afraid not. Life has taught me to value excitement over peace. But I?m learning, sometimes through wisdom, mostly through suffering, to see and to be what I already am: a member of one body, and to know that what goes on in one of us happens in all of us. St. Paul made it clear: ?If one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it. But if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it? (1 Corinthians 12: 26). The lesson: Choose to see others with the same eye God sees you.

[Michael Leach is publisher emeritus and editor at large for Orbis Books. His newest book is *Why Stay Catholic? Unexpected Answers to a Life-Changing Question*.]

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