

Sept 10, 2023

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Reflections

Proverbs 27 selected verses

- *"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what tomorrow brings. Let another praise you and not your own mouth."*
- *"Better is a neighbor who is nearby, than kindred who are far away."*
- *"Seize the truth that comes from a foreigner if it sounds sure and honest."*
- *"Just as water reflects one's face, so one human heart reflects another."*

1 Cor. 13:12

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but someday we will see face to face. Now my knowing is partial, but someday I will know fully and be fully known..."

John 14:6

"Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me you know the Father and have seen him.' Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.' But Jesus said, 'Philip, have I been with you this long and still you do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father..."

I do NOT enjoy seeing myself on TV.

“I don’t sound that way - do I?”

“I don’t look that way - do I?”

“What possessed me to say things THAT way?”

Seldom, if ever, do we see ourselves accurately.

We have a image of ourselves that is always partial

Which is why, back in seminary,

we were subjected to hours and hours

preaching in front of a TV camera;

being minutely scrutinized for our accents,

our diction, our grammar, our performance.

All to improve our public speaking

and allow preaching to be more about

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

and less about the theatrics of the preacher.

Sure, it numbed me a little bit, but still it’s uncomfortable.

Reflections.

Or as the Scottish poet, Robbie Burns so wisely put it,

“O wad Power the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us!”

In his poem, Burns capitalizes the word “Power”

because that power of reflection can be holy & mighty.

Reflection is the prime way we see Truthfully.

Reflection is the only way we truly grow & mature.

That said, I dare say,
most Christians do not understand the role of reflection
as it pertains to our faith.

Having truth reflected back to you
is the pathway to wisdom,
which is why the Book of Proverbs has so much to say
about it.

*“Just as water reflects one’s face, so one human heart
reflects another.”*

“Better is a neighbor who is nearby, than kindred who are far away.”

Evidently, family is NOT our most reliable
and truthful reflector.

A better reflector might be a neighbor nearby,
who sees our daily habits with greater honesty,
overhears our squabbles with less bias,
who shares with us many of the ups-and-downs
of regular life with deeper community.

But Proverbs takes it one step further.

“Seize the truth that comes from a foreigner if it sounds sure & honest.”

Wow!

Even foreigners can be a source of sacred reflection.
Can you imagine a single politician daring to espouse
what Proverbs proclaims.

And yet, there it is!

The role of sacred reflection is embedded in the bible.
The Apostle Paul spoke about it directly.

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly,
but someday we will see face to face.
Now my knowing is partial,
but someday I will know fully and be fully known...”*

But in other places it is more hidden.

For example, every Sunday, when we pray the words,
“on earth as it is in heaven”

that phrase can only be well understood as Reflection.

The ancients believed heaven was a distinct LAYER,
in God’s creation:

a layer hovering above the earth, seas and sky.

And that layer had an shiny undercoating -

meant to reflect on earth the divine truth of heaven.

Moreover, the reason that phrase,

found its way into our cherished Lord’s Prayer

is because early Christians saw Jesus

as their most reliable and sacred reflection of God.

He mirrored for them the wisdom of divinity.

Jesus was literally the fulfillment of

“on earth as it is in heaven.”

Thus, when John’s Gospel proclaims those lovely words,

“Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.”

they a sound a little less exclusive,
a little less egotistical and a lot more universal,
when we understand them in regards to holy reflection.

And theologically, Jesus as our holy reflection
automatically separates his individuality from God.
If he is a reflection of God,
there is no way he can be EQUAL to God.

Alas, Christianity has lost much of its Reflectivity.
There are plenty who claim the label “Christian”,
but have little sense of reflection.
They can’t stand criticism. They abhor confession.
Some hate being told any truth outside
what they believe about themselves.
Ironically, such people often love public attention
and crave celebrity.
It satisfies their desperate longing for self-esteem
the way Narcissus fell in love with his own image
while staring in the pool.

In Celtic spirituality, reflection is one of the great gifts of
true friendship.

The Celts celebrate someone called, “An Anamcara”.
An anamcara is a “soul friend” -

a trusted someone whom you know
will speak truth to you in love - even hard truth.
Someone who will reflect to you
who you are - not just as you see yourself,
nor just as the world sees you
but especially as God wishes you to be seen.

Right now I am smack-dab in wedding season.
I've had one almost every weekend for the last several
and I have another next weekend.
As I stand before these couples,
uniting them in marriage,
I wonder to myself, **“Are they lucky enough
to being marrying their “anamcara”?”**

So there are those with almost NO sense of reflectivity.
Then there are those with a just a little;
who call Jesus their “Lord”
and, on some level, see him as God's reflection.
But beyond that, things get dim.
Their own personal lives reflect very little of Jesus.
Their own faith is quite opaque.

The other day a friend of mine told me this story.
He had just visited a farmer's market
on a community green in a small mid-west town.

There he saw a man carrying a sign in bold letters that read, “Black Lives Matter.”

Being a gregarious and curious guy,
he went up to the fellow

& asked him about his experience of holding that sign.

The sign-holder gladly shared,
that he stood on that green 2 hours every day,
rain or shine.

During the weekdays, 90% of reactions were positive:
people would beep horns with a little “thumbs up”,
or roll down windows and yell, “Thanks”.

Only about 10% of the time,
did he receive cat-calls, snide remarks
or someone flashing him “the bird”.

But on Sundays, he said, things were different.
On Sundays, multitudes came to town to worship and
traffic increased.

And reactions changed - changed to about 50 - 50,
positive and negative.

Now, I know that is hardly a scientific study,
but it certainly begs the question:
How many Christians try to reflect Jesus in their lives?
Do their politics don't reflect him?

Do their social attitudes don't reflect him?

Does their personal demeanor, their character and spirit reflect Him?

The other day, a friend reminded me, of a simple fact about mirrors.

If a mirror breaks, each piece still reflects a whole image.

Immediately it made me think,

when Jesus was crucified,

God's mirror was shattered.

But the true followers of Jesus were each meant

to be all those tiny pieces

still reflecting his life and love.

In closing, all this makes me think of telescopes.

Such a simple yet amazing tool to explore outer space.

Using curved and polished mirrors they reflect minute amounts of light in the nighttime sky.

Yet, from that little bit of light they can deduce amazing things about the universe.

The most powerful telescope made is the **James Webb Telescope**.

With it scientists can explore outer space, analyzing the universe back 200 million years.

Well friends, Christians also have an amazing mirror -
a mirror to help us explore and understand **inner** space.
That mirror is Jesus - our reflector of God.
And when we SEE his reflection and BE his reflection,
God's divine love shines - *on earth as it is in heaven.*

Prayer of Pastoral Care Sunday, September 10, 2023
Psalm 119, a psalm of the glories of God's law, says,
"Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law; and observe it with my whole heart. In your righteousness give me life." Ps. 119:33a,34,40b. Let us pray for ourselves and the world saying, Compassionate God, **hear our prayer.**

God of grace and steadfast love, we thank you for your commandments, which order our life together. We thank you for calling us to live honorably with one another, and pray for your grace as we try to do all you require of us. Increase in us, we pray, the capacity to love you and our neighbors without reserve, and to love even those who harm us. Not halfheartedly, but with our whole hearts, we bring before you the cares, the concerns, and the joys that occupy us.

Compassionate God, **hear our prayer.**

We remember before you those who are at odds with one another in families, in neighborhoods or at work, and even in the church. We pray for nations in the midst of internal or external struggles and conflict. We pray for the people of Sudan, of Ukraine, of Haiti and all places of violence. Teach us, O God, to seek nonviolent ways toward resolution. We give thanks for perseverance in the midst of danger and loss of life. We pray for all victims of Friday night's devastating earthquake in Morocco, in the city of Marrakesh & surrounding towns

and villages near and in the Atlas Mountains with over 2,000 dead. We give thanks for all who will come and have come to help with search and rescue.

Compassionate God, **hear our prayer.**

On this Rally Sunday, we place before you not only our cares, but also our joys -- a birthday celebrated, an anniversary enjoyed; new beginnings – a baby born, a new school year and a new church school year begun. We thank you, O God, for the gift of laughter, for enduring friendships, and for cherished memories.

Compassionate God, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we pray for those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

O God of compassion, we give thanks that with you, there is always a new beginning, a way where there is no way, hope beyond hope, and life beyond death. Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. **Amen.**

HYMN # 392 Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether

OFFERING Paul's counsel to the church in Rome, and to us, is this: "*Owe no one anything, except to love one another.*" So come, let us love one another, and all in God's world, by sharing what we have been given so that needs are met and the gospel is lived & proclaimed.

*DOXOLOGY

*PRAYER O God, we offer now our time, our talents, and our resources to be used for your good purposes, and all for love's sake. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN # 589 Lord, I Want to Be a Christian

