

Sermon :: 26-Oct-2025
Proper 25, Year C

“ increase in us the gifts of faith, hope and charity ”

FACE. Whenever we enter a new situation ... a new role ... a new group of people ... one consideration may be what FACE we'll put on—what *demeanor* we'll *adopt* ... until we've grown comfortable and intuitively *know* what's right for us.

- We take a new job or get promoted into a new role: Do we go in brimming with confidence and can-do ... or with curiosity and kindness?
- We're meeting our prospective in-laws ... or maybe our spouse's best friend ... for the first time: Do we delight in trying to learn as much as we can about *them* and *their* relationship with our mutual beloved ... or seek to assure them how much our mutual beloved means to *us*?
- We've been invited on a trip or hike to a *place* we know well, but with people whom we *don't*: Do we gravitate toward the center, offering up knowledge and experience, as an unofficial 'tour guide' ... or hang back and let the group *discover* the journey, as *we* once did?

FACE is a question that *parents*, I think, must wrestle with *a lot*, as new situations present themselves and opportunities arise: Is this a time for the FACE of *good order: enforcing* the rules about screen time or chores? ... or of *harmony: bending* them, for a greater good? A time for the FACE of *wisdom: telling* our teenager that her new friends may not be the best for her? ... or of *development: giving* her *space* to make her own choices? A time for the FACE of *number-one-fan: encouraging* him to '*go for it*'—try out for the varsity team or the lead role, even though he's likely to *fail*? ... or of *protector: urging circumspection*, to avoid a bitter disappointment? While there's rarely only *one right* FACE for a given moment ... with each new challenge or new question ... *some* FACES may be better than *others*.

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We're all now living in new times ... replete with new challenges and new questions ... aren't we? The ways in which this country has changed over the last few decades ... the last few election cycles ... or even the last few months—whether you see them as highly *encouraging* or deeply *distressing*—have been monumental ... breath-taking, even; *and* such change shows no sign of ending anytime soon. So, whether you think we're finally turning this country around and pointing it toward a promising new future ... or we've driven ourselves off the road and are headed for a calamitous crash—*regardless*—we're *all* confronting big choices, about FACE: What *posture* to take ... what *demeanor* to *adopt* ... in these most unusual, highly stressful times. And in some ways, our options come down to the two FACES Jesus paints in His parable today:

- On the *one* hand, we can put on the FACE of the Pharisee: the smug, self-righteous, slightly above-it-all prig who not only celebrates ... but even proclaims—out *loud*—and to *God*, no less!—his moral superiority over the 'riff-raff' he strives to keep at a distance. The path *I've* chosen is blameless. The life *I'm* leading is holy. The causes *I* support are true and just. Thank God *I'm* not like those sinful, benighted and beleaguered others: not only *wrong* ... but also too *helpless* ... or *stupid* ... or, even, *evil* ... to *know* it, or do

anything *about* it.

- On the *other* hand, we can put on the FACE of the tax collector ... who, standing before the *same* God in the *same* Temple, at the *same* time as the Pharisee ... can **lift up only** his many sins and shortcomings, and beg God's *forgiveness*. Oh Lord, I get it wrong again and again ... however good my intentions ... however noble my desire. *Pity me, please,* and *help* me do **better**.

Jesus praises the tax collector for wearing a FACE of *introspection* and *humility*: for *examining inwardly*, more than *judging outwardly*; for acknowledging his *own* role in the ills of this world, as much as *others'*; for knowing that the walk of *true* faith isn't some self-blinded strut of superficial holiness—"God and me? Why, we're like *this!*" [***crossed fingers***] ... but an honest confession of our own limitedness, and—at the ***same time***, and *this*, I think, is ***key***—a renewed commitment to making this *world* a better place ... by *doing better ourselves*.

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So, what does the tax collector's FACE ... the face of introspection and humility ... indeed, the very FACE of Jesus *Himself* ... *look* like, in these new, troubled and troubling times of ours? Well, I think it's the FACE today's collect paints for us:

- A FACE of *quiet, persistent faith*: a spiritual steadfastness, born of our rootedness in Jesus and our dwelling in the Holy Spirit ... that, unlike the *Pharisee's*, doesn't need to brag about how *right* we are or make a *spectacle* of our piety. Jesus invites people to follow Him all the time, everywhere He goes—for He has *Good News* to share! But He does so *quietly* and *modestly* ... without over-shouting His opponents, warping the truth or jamming the public airwaves.
> Is, I wonder, the *faithful* FACE ... in these times ... the quiet-but-passionate pursuit of justice, mercy and peace ... and not pounding the correctness of our views as loudly and frequently as we can?
>> Might, then, the temperature of these overheated times, at last, begin to *cool* a little?
- It's a FACE of *engaging others, in hope*: of refraining from judging or rejecting those who disagree with us ... and actively seeking constructive, affirming ways to interact with them *despite* our differences. Again and again, we see Jesus interacting with those¹ who will reject Him: He answers their questions ... tolerates their testing ... welcomes those who seek sincere dialogue.² He offers His new truth to all ... and *earnestly* ... but without issuing them ultimatums, cancelling them or succumbing to ugly moral superiority.
> Is, I wonder, the *hopeful* FACE ... in these times ... speaking *civilly* with those with whom we differ ... even when they don't repay *us* the same courtesy? Seeking to genuinely understand *why* they hold their views ... without the **false** fear—*hear* that: the **false** fear—that merely listening to what they say, without argument, is tantamount to our

¹ I need to be a little nuanced here: Jesus is critical (and sometimes, highly so) of the religious authorities of the day, including the Pharisees, who consistently use their authority to keep the Jewish faithful away from Him ... although He never closes down the dialogue or smears them. Even when He's deeply critical of them ("Woe to the Pharisees, who ..."), I, at least, hear this in the vein of *repentance*—calling them to turning their hearts. But with the vast majority of the people He encounters, while Jesus is persistent in His efforts, He's also nevertheless respectful of those who go choose to go another way.

² *E.g.*, Nicodemus and the wealthy young man.

agreeing with their opinions or condoning their beliefs? And allowing space for God, *too*, to work to change their hearts ... rather than thinking it's all up to us, *alone*?
>> Might approaching others as *partners*, and not *pariahs*, bring back to the fore how much more we have in *common*, in terms of existence and destiny over the long-run, than whatever divides us in the moment?

- And it's a FACE of always privileging the *humanity of others*, in **charity**: of seeing *all* people as the siblings in Christ that they *are* ... and not branding them as the 'problem,' the 'poison' or the 'perversion' that they're *not*. Jesus is *constantly* interrupting what He's doing to cleanse the spirits of those whom He encounters ... to heal their diseases ... to pray over their woes ... to feed their stomachs. He always has what He needs,³ but all His *efforts* go into making sure *others* do, too.
> Is, I wonder, the *charitable* FACE ... in these times ... to reorient our very ample lives—even in *small* ways—to help supply others what they are systemically deprived of at the hands of power in this world? Kindness and compassion. Regard and respect. Fairness and equality. Dignity and acceptance.
>> Might we be surprised by how *good* life is for *everyone* ... when we dismantle the systems that make it *superlative* for the *few*?

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Faith. Hope. Charity. These are FACES Jesus has freely given ... and highly commends ... to us *all*: *godly* FACES—*Jesus* FACES—we can put on, to engage with ... to *counter* ... to **transform** ... the grinding, grating human certainty ... despair ... selfishness ... and emptiness that are so pervasive in these new times.

However tempting it may be to put on the *swaggering, self-righteous* FACE of the Pharisee ... as Jesus tells us: *He's* riding for a *big* fall. Put on, instead, the *humble* FACE of the tax collector: **living in faith** ... **exuding hope** ... and **doing charity**. For in so doing ... we reacquaint this world with the FACE of its loving Savior ... Whom it needs to see *now*, more than ever.

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³ Indeed, there are references in the gospels to others—many (if not mostly) women—who support Jesus' ministry in material ways. To think anachronistically, we see a Franciscan theme here: of *choosing* to rely on the generosity of others for our needs, so as to draw us *all* into deeper, more interdependent, more Spirit-filled (and -led) community.