

RESURRECTION OF THE BODY? REALLY?

This past week I was at The Malvern Retreat House with a hundred other priests as part of our Continuing Education program. On Wednesday afternoon there was a two hour break in the presentations (probably to allow us older priests to get a nap). I chose to drive over to Camilla Hall which is the retirement facility for the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. My sixth grade nun is there and I thought I would make a surprise visit to her. At the front desk was a retired sister who answered my questions and directed me to Sister's room. She asked me to sign in and then asked me my name. Father McHenry. "Did you ever teach at the Seminary?" "Why yes, but many years ago." "Well you taught me." "Sister there were many students and I am afraid I don't remember you but I am glad to have taught there." "You were a good teacher." Thank you Sister you are very kind."

I then visited my sixth grade sister for about 45 minutes. When I opened her door and looked at her I saw her face went quizzical for a split second and then broke into a most wonderful smile of recognition. A big hug. A big kiss. A big smile. I am sure my face showed the same thing. Sister Marie Honora. I only had her for one half of a year. Yet she made an impression and impacted my life. She saw something in me and she knew I was smart but lazy and so she pushed me and leaned on me and would not settle for less than my best.

As I left her room I walked the corridor and immediately was lost. Then I saw a Sister in a little motor scooter and it turns out that it is Sister Michael who organized the pastoral visits at Abington Hospital for the five parishes who cover it for almost 15 years. She had had a stroke
But was recovering nicely. Big hug. Big kiss. Big smile. I am guessing that my face shone with love for Sister. We parted company and I started to walk but quickly realized I had no idea where I was going.

Another Sister saw me and asked if I was lost and needed help. I did. I was looking for the elevator to the lobby. "Follow me. What's your name, Father?" "Father McHenry." She paused and said: "I served with you in the early seventies in Broomall." She said her name, Sr. Marita Christine (now, Sr. Mary Lou Gallagher) and I immediately remembered the name. Then as I looked at her face I recognized her but forty plus years—she looked the same but different. I had not seen her in so long. Needless to say we had both undergone some of the effects of aging. Big hug. Big kiss. Big smile. Her face shone. I am guessing mine did too. At the elevator another Sister came by and she was introduced as the house organist and I extended a hand in greeting and said my name. This Sister said: "You taught me at the Seminary." I had no recollection of her personally although I enjoyed my teaching there.

I wasn't at Camilla Hall a total of two hours. In that time I encountered one Sister who taught me, one I served with, two I taught and one more who assisted me. Two I recognized and then one more after I focused. It was quite an afternoon. Those nuns made my day and I hope I helped to make theirs. Women of faith. Religious women. Faithful women followers of Jesus Christ and devoted to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart. Some didn't recognize me right away and some I did not recognize right away. In all everyone's face shone a little brighter. The psalm today says: "Lord, let your face shine on me." So. Is that what was happening there in those two hours? Was the Lord letting his face shine upon me? And them? I got great affirmation from each of those Sisters even though I don't think they knew it. I was happy to see them and I think my face showed that. My hope is that they let that shine enter into their hearts as a little gift from Our Lord. He lets his face shine all the time but mostly through our faces. I, in turn, let the light of their faces shine inside of me.

But in our lives as adults something happens to us at times and we veil our faces, we hide what is really going on inside. We veil our faces from one another. I don't think this is necessarily a good thing. I believe the Lord needs our faces to shine. Moms and dads have to let their faces shine on their children much more than they need to correct or admonish their children. I believe you must look for occasions when you can shine your faces upon your children. Husbands and wives need to allow their faces to shine on their partners, their spouses much more than they allow their anger or disappointment to show. But we must work on these things. We must seek to allow our faces to shine with the joy that is within our hearts, with the love that seeks to shine forth from within our souls—the light of Christ Himself, from His very Spirit.

I have a little theory. The more we allow our faces to shine the more people will come to realize that Christ himself is shining upon them. We need to see his face, just like the apostles and the disciples in the Upper Room. They needed to see him, touch him, hear him, break bread with him, and walk with him. They needed to see his face, see his love shine upon them. But it so often comes through others. And we have to help each other name the truth of what we experience. In faith we have to begin to connect the dots. There is no happenstance in life, no coincidences, no serendipitous events. There is only grace and time, the time we need to recognize even when it has been a while and we don't at first recognize the other or truly grasp that in this person that the Lord is near, very close by. But in the person and circumstances of another. Grace to be able to realize the Lord is near even when we don't recognize him right away.

The Lord's face, the Lord's countenance is one of joy and delight. If we encourage our faces to shine, others will come to grasp that the Lord is very near. That he truly is risen! Truly is alive! Truly lives in other men and women of faith. And answers the prayer of the psalmist but sending those with smiling face, big hugs and big kisses and big smiles. To remind us that we all have reason to rejoice.