

APPEARANCES AND PREJUDICES



My bad back had prevented me from doing much-needed yard work. As I walked past a house in the neighborhood I saw a Hispanic man working the yard. I almost stopped to ask of his availability, but I was glad of my hesitance because I was suddenly aware that he lived there. Appearances and Prejudices.

Decades ago a friend of mine conducted a large hydrostatic body fat test at OHSU. I was 7+%. An obviously fit woman followed me, surely no more than 20%, but my friend told me later that she was 30%. Appearances and Prejudices.

When Mary was betrothed to Joseph but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her” (Matthew 1:18-20). Appearances and Prejudices.

Years ago Portland hosted a road race that attracted many talented runners, the ones who start at the front of the race pack so as not to be impeded. One runner did not belong in the front row; he was stocky, not the 7% body-fat type of runner. While others wore racing shorts, his were baggy nylon shorts. He wore a Mister Bubble t-shirt. He finished second in this 10K race with a time of 28.32. Appearances and Prejudices.

At least ten years ago I was shopping for clothes and a lady near me carried on a robust conversation with herself. I thought, “Oh oh, mentally ill.” Then I saw hidden under her hair a relatively new contraption called the “Bluetooth.” Appearances and Prejudices.

Stephen Covey, creator of “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” tells the story of being on a subway one Sunday morning when a man and his children board a train. Immediately the kids start running up and down the train car annoying riders. Finally Covey said to the man, “Mister you need to correct your children, they are bothering the passengers.” The man looks up from his daze and says Oh, I’m sorry. We just left the hospital where their mother died about one hour ago. I guess they don’t know how to handle it and frankly I don’t either. Appearances and Prejudices.

My preschool kids were in the car when I saw this hippie-type – shoulder-length light-brown hair, beard, funky white “hippy” clothes – crossing the street. One of my kids exclaimed, “Look, there’s Jesus!” The other one quickly turned and cried, “There’s Jesus!” Appearances and Prejudices.

In today’s First Reading, Ahaz would tempt God by asking for a sign. Thirty years ago I suffered a debilitating injury that prevented me from running. The pain was so terrible that for months I braced myself every time I sneezed. I did not ask for a sign but I did pray fervently for healing and every morning I jumped out of bed, fully expecting that my prayers had been answered. Every morning I was disappointed. Discouraged, I wondered why God had never answered my prayers. Instead I was eventually directed to a chiropractor, who practiced this foreign alternative medicine.

If Ahaz or the house of David had received a sign from God or if I had received the answer from God that I prayed for then we would *know* that God exists. Appearances, Prejudices and the Limitations of Being Human.

A few years ago I realized that I had visited this chiropractor ever since that first referral, had referred hundreds of patients to him, and discovered a new friend. God had answered my prayer, not as I wanted but as only God could. And therefore I do not know that God exists because I saw, but because I believe. I have faith. Every time I can move past my attitudes and prejudices and limitations, I move closer to God.

(Readings for 4th Sunday of Advent)



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