

HOMILY

The Second Sunday of Lent *February 28, 2010*

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This past week an amazing event took place. The president of Toyota went before Congress to apologize for sticking gas pedals and mushy brakes. But he wasn't just another CEO trying to offset the bleeding of red ink all over his company's bottom line. He was also the grandson of Toyota's founder, and he was desperately trying to save face—for himself and for the past and future generations of his family.

In Asian cultures “face” is everything. “Face” is the most positive social value a person can claim. One's “face” is the combination of honor, reputation, responsibility, prestige and worthiness. To “lose face” is to behave in such a way that every aspect of one's being is diminished, disfigured, disgraced!

I'm sure that you're quite familiar with “Facebook!” Western culture now increasingly defines social relationships on Facebook. On our Facebook accounts, we can create the image of ourselves that we want others to see. We can edit out aspects of our lives that might be embarrassing, uncomplimentary, or just “too much information.” We can post only the most flattering pictures of ourselves. We can fudge facts or write complete fictions. We can even have multiple Facebook accounts.

But we do not have complete control over our Facebook face. Others can leave messages, report gossip, or reveal secrets on our wall for everyone to see. Already there have been too many cases where teenage hazing and cruelty have led to the last, desperate act of the faceless—ending their own lives—because without face they believe there is no life.

The bottom line is: The more Facebook, the more face-time.

Let me put it another way: The more Facebook, the more face-to-face in your face. The more we depend on cyberspace face-offs and virtual face-lifts, the more real “in-your-face” time we need to make in our lives. Making face-time with friends, family colleagues, and neighbors takes away the electronic filters that hide us or protect us. It is face-time that makes us vulnerable, that makes us real, that makes us human.

In today's Gospel, the relationship between God and God's people goes from Facebook to face-time. As Jesus stands before God in prayer, his heart and mind and soul are in full communication with his Father. His face changed in appearance. Jesus' true identity was revealed as God's glory come face-to-face with Jesus' humanity.

Jesus is the human face of God.

Jesus is how God finally made face-time with the world.

The Bible is our "Faithbook" that reveals God's face.

Jesus spent his ministry doing three things: Healing, teaching and preaching. As Jesus healed and taught and preached, he gave glimpses of God's glory that drew people nearer to the divine. When Philip blurted out his blindness by imploring Jesus to "show us the Father and we will be satisfied," Jesus pulled back the curtain even further. "*Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*"

The face that God revealed in Jesus is the face of God. The face that God revealed in Jesus is the face of love. "*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my Father's commandments, you will abide in my love.*"

Jesus said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Jesus, the human face of God, came to reveal the true face of God, the creator of the universe. And the true face of God is the face of love.

A well-known scientist once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said, "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise."

The scientist gave a smile and asked, "What is the tortoise standing on?"

"You're very clever, young man, very clever," said the old woman. "But its turtles all the way down."

So, you tell me you want to find God's face? You want to see God's face? I tell you, find someone to love and you will find God's face. You will see God's face for it is love, all the way down. And when you see the face of love, the world is transfigured and we become changed from "*glory into glory.*"

There was an NPR special that ran last September 11th on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The NPR special featured a retired New York City firefighter, John Vigiano, who lost two sons in 9/11—John, Jr., also a firefighter, and his brother Joe, a police officer. Both died in the World Trade Center.

John was close to both of his sons. He talked to each of them every day. He recalled how around 3:30 PM on September 10th he talked to John, Jr. They ended the call by saying, "I love you." The next morning, Joe called him and told him the earliest details of the attacks. That call also ended with "I love you." John Vigiano told NPR, "We had the boys, John for thirty-two years, Joe for thirty-four. I don't have any 'could've, should've, or would've.' I wouldn't change anything." It's not many people that the last words they said to their son or daughter was "I love you."

Is your face a true reflection of that face? Will you reflect the true face of God this week?

