

## A View From The Mirror

There's the story of a middle aged southern woman who spends most of her life congratulating herself that she's not like all of the people around her.

She rarely says it out loud or directly, it just kind of oozes out of her; that sense of "Thank you Jesus, for not making me like them!"

One day, this lady is sitting in an over crowded, over heated, doctor's office.

A fat, acne scarred teenage girl is sitting directly across from her.

After listening to the lady prattle on for half an hour or so, after scowling at the lady every minute of that half hour or so, the teen throws the heavy book she's been reading, hitting the lady right between the eyes.

The teenager isn't done.

She leaps out of her chair, grabs the woman by the throat, and leaning into her ear says in a voice deep and hard: "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog." Flannery O'Connor, A Revelation.

And son of a gun....

The lady, for the first time in her life, sees herself for what she has become after too many years of patting herself on the back; after too many years of holding others in contempt.

She sees herself, and she is changed -- after being smacked right between the eyes.

No wonder this story is entitled: A Revelation.

Today's gospel is a lot like that story.

Jesus is back in his hometown.

And before you know it, Jesus becomes the fat, pimply-faced teenager as he too smacks his neighbors right between the eyes, hoping that they will come to see themselves as they are, and in the seeing, be changed.

Today is homecoming day for Jesus.

He's been doing wonderful things!

The coconut wireless is going crazy about healed outcasts and demons on the run, water becoming wine and amazing words of wisdom coming from this hometown boy.

And the hometown crowd is looking to bask in some of this glory.

But Jesus doesn't go along with the plan.

Instead of congratulating them for living in the right town, he challenges them to see that they too must change if they hope to get the marvelous gift that God is handing out through this unexpected Messiah.

When he says "this scripture is fulfilled **in your hearing**" he's saying you have to have the ears to hear it — or you'll miss it by a mile!

Which turns the good news into bad news for them, because they, like we so often do, feel fine just the way we are — and that's why they try to bum rush him over a cliff!

Today's gospel is a stark reminder that folks then and folks today aren't much different when it comes to Jesus smacking us between the eyes -- so that we too might come to see ourselves as we are -- and change.

It's why we get together every week.

It's human nature to avoid self-examination, to thank God for not making us like that riffraff over there.

Except with Jesus, it doesn't work that way.

One fellow says the whole point of our Sunday service is to disarm a likely lynch mob by having us gaze on the One whom we have crucified.

That fellow doesn't have a high opinion of humanity, left to our own devices.

Of course, nor does the church.

Which is why, every Palm Sunday, the entire congregation yells out with one voice: "Crucify him!"

The church recognizes that who we are, left to our own devices, is a scary thing; that the worst advice you can ever give to anyone is: Be yourself!

Jesus has no illusions about us, and his invitation to follow him is an invitation to drop the illusions we have about ourselves.

Not long ago, the Dalai Lama was in town.

His visit was blissful and serene.

Everywhere His Holiness went, peace and calm entered the room.

But it's not that way with Jesus.

When Jesus shows up, there's usually pandemonium!

Think of him cleaning out the temple of people selling religion or confronting the religious big shots in their self importance, not to mention enraging his entire hometown today!

It happens that way because Jesus goes deep, past all appearances, down to the depths of who we really are, so we may finally be able to see.

This ability to see isn't about theory or highly personal spirituality.

The ability to see impacts our every day lives because every day there is a collision between heaven and earth, and every day we get the chance to peek behind the veil.....

Many of you know about the struggles of the Hansen's disease, (formerly known as leprosy) patients, at Hale Mohalu that happened right here in the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

Hale Mohalu was a home away from home for Kalaupapa patients who had to be in Honolulu for medical treatment.

After years of intentional neglect, the State decided to close Hale Mohalu and relocate the patients to a hospital, so that a sports complex could be built on the site.

Of course, since that time, Damian, the priest who worked with the Kalaupapa patients, and who died of the disease, has become a saint.

Our own Stuart Ching has played a huge role in getting the Damian museum up and running.

But even before Rome recognized his sanctity, we in Hawaii honored Damian with a statue at the capitol, a high school named after him, and an annual parade.

What always struck me during the Hale Mohalu struggle was the contrast between all of the official niceties shown to Fr. Damian and the miserable way the same government leaders were treating the children of Damian, the patients who lived at Hale Mohalu.

One year, during the annual Damian Day parade, there were high school bands, the governor, dancers and music and even the Roman Catholic Bishop; all together to celebrate the legacy and service of Fr. Damian.

The Hale Mohalu patients came as well, with signs protesting the closing of their home.

The newspaper reports that "just as the audience was beginning to leave, a red-faced Damian High School mother stalked up to [patient leader Bernard] Punakai`a saying:

"The Damian planning committee worked for months on this celebration and your group disrupted it.

It was in very poor taste!

You're just trying to push your issue, and it has nothing to do with this event!"  
Honolulu Advertiser, 4/18/78.

That Damian High School mom, I'm sure, worked really hard to make a successful Damian Day celebration.

But she was so focused on her parade that she missed seeing that the man they were honoring with bands and balloons was standing right before her eyes: Bernard was Damian!

I don't blame the irate mom.

We all have problems seeing the things that really matter.

The Discovery Channel the other night talked about our ability to see.

They noted that we see only "visible light," that most light is completely invisible to us: ultra violet, infrared, gamma, xray, and they gave this fascinating example about how much we can't see.

They said that if the total amount of light in the universe was reduced to a rope that circled the earth, about 25,000 miles, only one inch of that rope is the kind of light visible to the human eye!

The reason I think that Jesus keeps hitting us between the eyes is so that we can remember, every day, that what we think we know, what we think we see, is only a tiny part of what is actually right in front of us.

When Jesus smacks us between the eyes, when we willingly take up our cross in love, vistas that were once hidden suddenly are in bloom; understanding that once seemed impossible suddenly unfolds; and the peace that passes all understanding becomes our walking companion, as we trudge this road of happy destiny.

+amen