

FACE TO FACE

Psalm 27 says "Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me."

Be careful what you pray for, good psalmist. Do you realize that the appearance of God's face turns our world on its head? Even if we pray hourly, the face we see confounds us. We expect a ruddy, scrubbed face, with eyes full of wonder and fire. Instead, we see the leathery face of an itinerant rabbi, his eyes strained and wearied by dusty roads. We expect a handsome hero's face. What we see is one "Marred beyond human semblance...(with) no form or majesty that we should look at him nothing in his appearance that we should desire him... as one from whom others hide their faces" (Isaiah 52:14, 53:2-3). This is the face that dwells among us. We pray for an opportunity to behold the beauty of God's face. What we see is a face filled with pain. We see this timeless face on the homeless on street corners, this lonely face that follows us even to church. Look into this terrible face, God seems to say, and find my beauty there. While many look elsewhere for a face they can believe in, some keep their eyes on that broken face, and find a new challenge: "Take up your cross and follow me." The face demands our lives.

You prayed too well, good psalmist. The face dwells among us. Your prayer is answered. Yet we behave as if nothing happened, as if your prayer amounted to no more than a passing sentimental fancy. We make our decisions as if that face never showed itself. We distract ourselves with television and gaze at faces that fit our prayers and expectations -- Hollywood stars, professional athletes, talk show hosts, even televangelists. We search not for the face of God, but for the face we had in mind.

Good psalmist, pray for us again. Pray for the Lord to give us courage and persistence to look into God's face until we see the beauty behind the suffering. Pray that the death we die in seeing that face will not be the end for us, but the beginning. Pray that God's face will not be a face of terror but a face of grace, for we are helpless

before it.

Paul promised, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face." In our search for God's face, we see only bad reflections of ourselves. Good psalmist, pray for God to prepare us for the mirror's breaking, for the death of those distorted images of ourselves. Let the Holy Spirit prepare us to look into those holy eyes and see a look of love beyond our wildest dreams. Then pray once more, on behalf of us all, "Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me."

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