

Reflection

'I See You'

JIM SMITH

When visiting a local liquor store to purchase wine, I am immediately greeted by staff when I open the door. I hear a loud and hearty “Hello!” or “Welcome!” Most often, staff are quite busy ringing up customers, yet without fail they go out of their way to look to the store’s entrance and call out their greeting. I have to say, it feels pretty good. It’s why I come back to that store.

I carry no illusion that with their “hello” these good folks are thinking “Look! A beloved child of God, unique in all the universe.” No, to them I’m just a guy willing to spend some money in their store. So why does it feel good? Because it touches into a universal human desire to be known and to know, to be loved and to love. A simple hearty “hello” can stir a truth buried deep: “I am somebody,” in the words of the Rev. Jesse Jackson; “I am “beloved of God,” in the words of faith. And as God’s beloved, we are all worthy to be seen, to be known, to be loved. I’m smiling as I write, because it would likely confound those store employees to hear this. “Gosh, we’re just here to sell wine,” might be their response.

Yet it is just as true for them. In their daily encounters, who will see them, acknowledge them, in such a way that the spark of their beloved

elderly woman walking slowly with the help of a nurse’s aide at her side. With one hand, the aide — a young woman probably in her early 20s — was holding on to the belt wrapped around the elder’s waist, and with the other hand pulling the woman’s wheelchair. Then in a frail, somewhat frightened voice, the resident said, “I have to sit. I can hardly breathe.” Immediately, the aide helped the woman into the chair; the aide hunched on her knees, placed her hand on the resident’s hand, and with her own eyes met the woman’s unsettled gaze. The aide said not a word in those moments, yet her expression spoke eloquently. “I see you. I’m here. You’ll be all right.”

That afternoon in a planned presentation to the staff about our core value of respect, I described to the group what I had witnessed earlier between the young aide and the resident. As I finished the description, I met the aide’s eyes and acknowledged her for her simple, extraordinary service. There is little doubt that at her core, the truth of her own dignity and beloved-ness was stirred.

You may be familiar with this Gospel snapshot (Luke 5:13-25): The scene inside a packed house, Jesus standing beside a paralyzed man on a stretcher who has just benefited from an outrageous act. Because of the crowd, the man’s friends — his caregivers — have punched a hole in the roof and gently lowered the man to the feet of Jesus with ropes. Jesus looks up at the caregivers as they peer

In their daily encounters, who will see them, acknowledge them, in such a way that the spark of their beloved identity is stirred and awakened?

identity is stirred and awakened? It might just be a customer at the counter, someone who looks them in the eye, smiles, asks how they’re doing. In that simple moment, a connection is made.

I was walking the halls at one of our skilled nursing communities when I came up behind an

Hope In Despair

down from the edges of the gaping hole. Moved by their faith, he proclaims the paralytic's sins to be forgiven and for the man to be healed. Jesus affirms the faith of the man's caregivers as the reason for the healing. He sees them and affirms their place in the crucial ministry of compassionate care.

Inside or outside a pandemic, our caregivers must be seen. Do we see and attend to their grief when a beloved resident dies? Do we acknowledge their moral distress as they watch a patient diminish during months of isolated lockdown? Do we pay attention to and affirm the simple words and gestures

Burrowed deep within each caregiver is that spark of the Divine, that beloved identity.

they use to honor the dignity of those in their care? Do we greet them with warmth and appreciation, whether in the break room or in an email? Do we ask for their opinion and ideas and value their response? Is our culture grounded enough in care for the caregiver, such that we are consistently attentive in these and other ways?

Burrowed deep within each caregiver is that spark of the Divine, that beloved identity. Every encounter with our caregivers in which we lovingly embody the message "I see you" is a sacred moment and helps stir that beautiful spark into flame.

JIM SMITH is director, mission integration for Benedictine, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit with 33 senior care communities in five states.

For just this moment, bring your attention to your breath.

INHALE deeply and settle yourself into your body.

EXHALE the stress and tension you feel.

In these days of despair, a moment to pause is both a gift and a necessity.

GENTLE YOUR BREATHING, your gaze and your heart as you consider: Where have I found hope in the past days?

THINK FOR A MOMENT.

In these days of despair where have I found hope?

[Pause to consider]

DWELL in the hope you have found and bring it with you into the rest of your day. Even now, God is with you, as near to you as your breath. Continue giving yourself the gift to pause, breathe and heal, knowing you are not alone.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. ROMANS 5:5

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

www.chausa.org

HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, Spring 2021, Vol. 102, No. 2
Copyright © 2021 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States
