

Made in the Image

*For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.* In my most delusional moments, I believe that one day, all who claim the name Christian will take heed of these words from St. Paul: *We are convinced that one has died for all.* The God of all Creation, taking flesh in Jesus Christ, suffering upon the cross to inaugurate an age of freedom for all...an act of incredible humility predicated on the belief that all of God's children are worthy of salvation and sanctification. But, as I said, I only believe this when I give into my delusions because it has been 2,000 years, and still, we witness daily the dehumanization of our siblings in the human family.

Somewhere along the way, along the twisting and turning roads of human history, there arose the insidious belief that some human beings are worth more than others...that, in fact, some who appear to be human aren't really human beings at all. And so our language adapted to make room for such evil. Under the guise of the rule of law, empires and nation-states throughout history have found ways to castigate and demean the vulnerable in their midst. From animals, to aliens, it has become all too commonplace to bracket, categorize, and reduce people to something less than human.

But this, dearly beloved in Christ, is nothing short of evil. It is demonic. It is Satanic, standing in the tradition of that Great Deceiver who perverted the truth of God and encouraged the first human beings to replace the laws of God with those of their own design. To treat anybody in ways that systematically dehumanize them is Satanic precisely because it perverts this fundamentally beautiful truth of God: *From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human*

*point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

Could it be any clearer? Do we need another burning bush to impress this truth in our minds? For the Christian, for the one baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, for those who have confessed the Crucified One as Our Lord, there should be nothing that enables us to reduce any human being to something other than what they are...beloved children of God, beautiful to behold. St. Paul offers no language of qualification: *We regard NO ONE from a human point of view.* He wasn't speaking only of believers, only of converts, only of law abiding citizens who gave heed to the edicts of the Roman Empire. *No one*, he said. No Rule of Law, no border, no edict from Caesars or Kings, Chancellors or Prime Ministers, Attorney Generals or Presidents...nothing should supplant this truth. And yet, such pain we see in the world, a pain that reminds us we still have much work to do in transforming the world and building a better tomorrow.

For all he got wrong in other places, here...St. Paul got it right. When looking at the world, and gazing at all the people just trying to make their way through this cold, indifferent universe, a lens of faith is required that sees the inherent dignity, worth, and beauty of every human being. To privilege any other lens is a fundamental dereliction of one's Christian duty. It is, in fact, blasphemy.

But St. Paul doesn't stop there...he doesn't stop with his theological anthropology. He lays down an ethic from this...a summons, if you will, to a life poured out for the health and well-being of all of God's Children: *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation*

*to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

He has given us the ministry of reconciliation...entrusted to us the message of reconciliation...made us ambassadors for Christ...has called us to become the righteousness of God. This is an amazingly poignant and profound reflection on what it means to be a Christian. Forget dogma. Forget pledging. Forget first communions, confirmations, and chairing ministries. We are summoned to be co-workers with Christ in reconciling the world back to God...co-laborers with Christ in birthing a new world into being, right here in the midst of this one. Co-workers with the God of all Creation who did not hold our trespasses against us.

Look to your left and your right. See the face of a beloved child of God, beautiful to behold. See the best in them, see Christ in them. And go forth from this place with the same attitude, the same mindset, the same determination to love this stubborn world so much that it has no choice but to change.