Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“After Jesus had spoken, a Pharisee invited him to dine at his home” (Luke 11:37).

Argentinian actor Fernando Lamas, who died in 1982, got a second surge of popularity when comedian Billy Crystal revived his suave persona on “Saturday Night Live” with lines such as “You look marvelous” and “It is better to look good than to feel good.”

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus again goes after the Pharisees for exuding overt charm while plotting covert harm by inviting him to dinner in order to expose him as ritually negligent for not washing his hands before eating. They were living the lie that it is “better to look good than to be good” by claiming status and appearance without genuine purity of heart. They posed as moral guides but lived lives of pettiness and secret indiscretion.

Whatever the scribes and Pharisees were actually like in Jesus’ time, Luke and the other evangelists contrasted these leaders’ hypocrisy to his sincerity. Jesus confronts them with the absurdity of cleansing the outside of a vessel but not the inside. Luke quotes Jesus saying, “You fools!” for posing as righteous models while harboring “plunder and evil” within. This is only the start of Jesus’ all-out critique of his opponents, whom he will brand as “whitewashed tombs hiding dead men’s bones.”

Why this withering attack from an otherwise measured and civil Jesus? Their offense, we learn, was preventing others from accessing a loving God, for loading their own scruples and moral opinions on people’s backs without helping them find

God’s unconditional mercy.

Jesus, who came to reveal the face of divine love, could not tolerate any official representative of God who misrepresented God to ordinary people. The same Jesus who forgave every kind of weakness and failure in people weighed down by life’s struggles, had no patience for privileged, educated so-called models of virtue who were filled with pride and arrogance as they lorded it over those they were supposed to serve.

We all hope to feel good, but it is never better to look good than to be good. The charade never lasts, and when exposed, vice is vicious and self-defeating. Real virtue radiates from within even when physical appearance is judged deficient by some artificial standard for beauty.

Each time we attend Mass, we are dining with Jesus. It is good for us to understand the value he places on transparency and simplicity. The Eucharist is a powerful leveler of pride and judgmentalism, for we are all sinners invited to join together in gratitude for God’s infinite mercy. We will come away knowing we are made good by divine love and, perhaps, we will feel good and even look good as we convey that gift to others.

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