Opinion
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/ Milan Popovic)

by Michael Leach

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After more than 250 columns about seeing the invisible with the eye of the soul, this is the 10th anniversary of Soul Seeing.

In my first column, I quoted Dr. Thomas Hora, a psychiatrist who taught me about spiritual perception:

> We all have the faculty to discern spiritual qualities in the world. We can see beauty; we can see integrity; we can see honesty; we can see love; we can see goodness; we can see joy; we can see peace; we can see harmony; we can see intelligence; and so forth. None of these things has any form; none of these things can be imagined; none of these things is tangible, and yet they can be seen. What is the organ that sees these invisible things? Some people call it the soul, spirit, or consciousness.

I named the column Soul Seeing.

My dream was to write about the holy moments when time stands still and we see beneath appearances to the grace of God that runs through all things, hidden like gold in a mountain chain. Sometimes, without our asking, an alchemy of awareness happens. Our body's eyes give way to what the mystic Meister Eckhart referred to as the same eye through which God sees us: "My eye and God's eye are one – one seeing, one knowing, one love." And for just a moment our soul is quiet and it sees what the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins saw: "a world charged with the grandeur of God."

St. Ignatius wrote about "finding God in all things." Each of us has the ability to glimpse goodness or beauty or love in any person, place or thing. Sometimes a simple experience opens our inner eye to the realization that all is well, no matter what the world looks like, and we know what St. Julian of Norwich knew: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." These flashes last only a moment. But we never forget them.

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The mystics of all ages speak about direct consciousness of the presence of God. There is a difference between knowing *about* God and *knowing* God. St. Teresa of Avila described "a consciousness of the presence of God of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that God was within me and I was totally engulfed in him." She also gave us this great insight: "Christ has no body on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours. Ours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out upon the world, ours are the feet with which he goes about doing good, ours are the hands with which he blesses his people."

Dorothy Day was imbued with this awareness when she came upon a homeless woman on the Lower East Side:

> Early one morning on the steps of Precious Blood Church, a woman with cancer on the face was begging (beggars are allowed only in the slums) and when I gave her money (no sacrifice on my part but merely passing on alms which someone had given me) she tried to kiss my hand. The only thing I could do was kiss her dirty old face with the gaping hole in it where an eye and a nose had been. It sounds like a heroic deed but it was not. One gets used to ugliness so quickly. What we avert our eyes from one day is easily borne the next when we have learned a little more about love. Nurses know that, and so do mothers.

Soul seeing, like love, changes everything.

The woman "who was a sinner" had her soul seeing moment when "she wept and washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment" — and suddenly knew, "my sins are forgiven!" The paleontologist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin must have had many epiphanies while dusting off rocks and seeing in them pieces of stars that God had flung across the sky just like a child playfully tosses jacks along a sidewalk. The playwright Edmund Rostand surely grasped the truth of soul seeing when he wrote these words for Cyrano de Bergerac: "There comes one moment, once — and God help those who pass that moment by! — when Beauty stands looking into the soul with grave, sweet eyes that sicken at pretty words!"

My plan for Soul Seeing in 2011 was to write one column each month and call upon friends I had edited over a long career in publishing to write the others, but before I

knew it new writers were sending me stories and, as it says in the Book of Genesis, they were *very good*. So, for 10 years, NCR readers have been accompanying not only me on this journey but favorite writers like Richard Rohr, Joan Chittister, Joyce Rupp and Brian Doyle and new ones like Deirdre Cornell, Mark Redmond, Becky Eldredge and Dani Clark. The novelist Marcel Proust said about the spiritual journey, "My destination is no longer a place, rather a new way of seeing."

Soul Seeing columns are about looking at what is in front of our eyes and seeing what God has put *in* our eyes: love, mercy, goodness, beauty, grace, harmony, humility, compassion, gratitude, joy, peace, wisdom, salvation. Soul Seeing writers sit in front of their computers and remember. They contemplate again those moments when, without searching, they beheld something extraordinary in the ordinary, heard the "still, small voice of God" in a chapel or a forest or a subway train.

Each of us has "eyes to see" what is really there. Not just Dorothy Day, but all of us have the invitation to meet a beggar and kiss her cancerous face, the face of Christ in disguise. "It is only with the heart that one sees rightly," wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupery. "What is essential is invisible to the eye."

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