Spirituality
Soul Seeing



The "Homeless Jesus" sculpture by Timothy Schmalz is seen covered with snow outside Catholic Charities of the Washington Archdiocese Dec. 16, 2020. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)



by Pauline Hovey

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 27, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

He rolled around the Sprouts parking lot in his wheelchair, one leg extended, the other absent underneath the loosely hanging gray pant leg. I noticed him first, and moved to the next row, heading for my car. But he was quick, adept at getting himself around on the streets.

When he asked for cash I looked away, offering instead a knee-jerk "not today." But as I walked off with a bag filled with unnecessary groceries, I relented. It's true, these were items I had bought on sale, but most of them were indulgences, really, like the jar of Silly Cow hot chocolate and the organic lotion bar, the tin of gingerbread tea and the navel oranges to add to the half-dozen already waiting for me at home.

You can give the guy a buck, for God's sake, Pauline.

With the growing population of unhoused people in our city, I'd learned to keep dollar bills loose in the side pocket of my car door so I'd be prepared at stoplights and wouldn't have to go fishing in my wallet. I retrieved one of the single bills and went back to find him.

I was accustomed to seeing people asking for money, but usually not this close. And the man in the wheelchair was not someone I recognized from the usual community. He had ventured far beyond the perimeters of the traffic light corner, wheeling himself closer and closer to the Sprouts entrance and exit doors, certain to catch the attention of shoppers before they got into their cars and approached the light.

"Here," I said, as I handed him the dollar. And then, as if trying to explain my return, "I had this in my car."

He looked at the bill, his face a fist of wrinkled displeasure. "C'mon," he scowled. "Give me $100."



(Unsplash/Lucas Favre)

I must have blinked, maybe even jolted in place. "I don't have $100," I said, feeling a little riled at his rudeness.

"Well, how about $25 then?"

"How about you just take the dollar?" And I walked off, regretting my attempt to give anything at all and feeling simultaneously prideful and gullible as my negative inner talk got the best of me.

Until I paused to unlock my car door.

Wait. Who was I doing this for anyway? For myself? To receive an expectant "thank you" and a smile of appreciation? To feel good about my little act of charity? Or was it truly an act of kindness for a person in need in front of me. A man who may not know how to be thankful or kind. A man whose life I knew nothing about.

Advertisement

Suddenly, my imagination took over. It was as if Jesus were talking to me through this stranger's face.

Can you still love me when I look like this? When I act like this? When I don't meet your expectations?

As Jesus' sweet voice came through the face of this man, I realized what was being asked of me. To see with different eyes. To love with the heart of God.

> 'Suddenly, my imagination took over. It was as if Jesus were talking to me through this stranger's face.'
>
> Tweet this

My heart softened, even though the man's scowling countenance did not. He appeared before my imagination just as disheveled and distasteful as before. But the Christ within him now shone in a way that my judging self would not have been able to see. There was a warm spark buried within him that layers of pain and woundedness concealed.

True, I had to put my prideful ego aside. But wasn't this my intention? To discover You in all your many disguises? And You poked me right here in the supermarket parking lot. In the dark shadow of a one-legged man slumped in a wheelchair on an ugly blacktop with engines idling all around, car fumes emitting into my lungs and, instead of angelic choirs, the clanking sound of shopping carts crashing into a queue.

Not at all what I expected.

"You want to love me better?" You ask. "I'm right here."