Spirituality
Soul Seeing
Mike Leach NCR

Mike Leach in 2011, when he began Soul Seeing. (Courtesy of Mike Leach)



by Michael Leach

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

November 14, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

After 15 years, 414 columns, more than 450,000 words, and contributions from 112 writers, it's time to say goodbye to "Soul Seeing," the column I started in 2011 and have tended ever since.

NCR has decided to retire "Soul Seeing" as part of a reorganization of its Spirituality offerings. I will still write an occasional reflection, though not under the "Soul Seeing" banner, and NCR will keep in touch with many of the writers you first met here. I will miss playing with them, as well as NCR's incredible team, but am grateful that "Soul Seeing" had such a long run, and shared, in so many ways, the secret the wise fox taught the Little Prince: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

"Soul Seeing" began with a phone call from NCR's then-publisher Tom Fox. He asked me if I would like to write a regular column.

"Sure," I said, "but I don't think I have enough to say to write something helpful every other week. What if I write one column a month, and ask one of my authors to write the other one? That would bring a lot more energy to it."

Tom liked the idea but said there would have to be a unifying theme. Well, I said, it would be all about seeing, about those moments when we see the ordinary and perceive the extraordinary at the same time, when for an instant we behold a spiritual reality beneath appearances. Each columnist would share a personal story that reveals a treasure hidden in the field: beauty, wisdom, goodness, wholeness, love, mercy, gratitude, wonder, joy, forgiveness, peace, the good stuff of life. The columns would be epiphanies, the writer's and the reader's.

Tom dug it.

Over the next week, he and I, together with editor Tom Roberts and other NCR staff, kicked around names for the column. I came up with "Seeing With the Eye of the Soul," taking off from Augustine's idea about reading the Bible with "the soul's eye." The two Toms got back to me right away.

"Why don't we just call it 'Soul Seeing'?"

Bingo!

The first "Soul Seeing" column I wrote, "Christ and cerebral palsy," appeared in the print issue of Oct. 14, 2011. Alternate "guest columnists" included Joyce Rupp, Richard Rohr, Miriam Therese Winter, Sidney Callahan, Brian Doyle, Kathy Coffey, Jim Martin and Jack Shea.

Related: God, what do you want me to know?

By the end of the first year, something extraordinary happened. Other writers, some friends and some complete strangers, had become enthusiastic about "Soul Seeing" and contributed columns like pennies from heaven. Most of them, as it says in Genesis, were not only good but very good.

Many of these writers became regulars: Joni Woelfel, Patrick T. Reardon, Mary DeTurris Poust, Mark Redmond, Dani Clark, Peter Gilmour, Pauline Hovey, Tom Smith , B.G. Kelley, Sue Stanton, and Pierre Eau Claire, the pseudonym of a bishop who is also a poet and who last year invited me to Lambeau Field for a Packers-Bears game. (Bears won!)

I especially wanted to give young writers a chance to have their voices heard, as I had throughout a five-decade career in book publishing, so I gave more and more space to guest columnists. The youngest was a college sophomore, and the oldest a

95-year-old Sister of Mercy who had written 125 obituaries for her community!

My favorite column?

All of them.

What if I had to name just one favorite that I didn't write? OK, I'll keep it in the family and go with my brother-in-law Patrick Jephson, who wrote a sweet and funny piece about the friendship between Mother Teresa and Princess Diana, and a prayer that threatened to go on for way too long. Patrick was Diana's chief of staff. He is the most popular member of our extended family.

The one most commented upon? For sure, the 25 columns I wrote about experiencing the challenges of Alzheimer's disease for 20 years with my wife of 54 years, Vickie. Without sparing the heartbreak, I wanted to share a love story, encourage every caregiver and uplift every reader. Who among us does not have or know, love or care for someone with Alzheimer's? Vickie died four years ago. The letters still come.

Advertisement

The column that rang the NCR phone off the hook? Oh, boy!

The 10th and final column in my series about the fictional Bishop Morrie, the flawed, lovable and totally unpredictable bishop of Paris, Kansas. A readers' favorite, Morrie ran a soup kitchen in a diocesan center converted from an abandoned meatpacking plant that still had "the smell of sheep." He almost converted atheist Bill Maher when he was a guest on Maher's show and he secretly met with Pope Francis to advocate for divorced and remarried Catholics.

Some readers thought Morrie was the bishop-poet-Packer fan. (He was not!) But the last column, in which the beloved old bishop moved his congregation to tears by confessing his role in the abuse scandal, begging forgiveness and resigning during his last sermon, struck a deep chord. Readers called, emailed and texted NCR.

"Who is this guy?" they asked. "I want to know more about him. I can't even find Paris, Kansas, on the map."

NCR reran the column on its website with a disclaimer and links to all of the Bishop Morrie stories. All I'll say is this: There is a Paris, Kansas. Bishop Morrie can see it from his front porch.

Where did I get the idea for "Soul Seeing?"

It evolved from when I was a young man at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. Our English professor, Fr. Burrill, taught us the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Memorable lines swam in my soul like the net of fish hauled in from the deep by Jesus' disciples:

> *For Christ plays in ten thousand places,*
> *Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his*
> *To the Father through the features of men's faces.*

When I was home that summer, walking down Clark Street toward our apartment near Wrigley Field, for a brief time I perceived the face of Christ in everyone around me: the down-and-out man drinking from a bottle in a paper bag, the children running everywhere and nowhere. I knew everything and nothing at once.

Related: Poetry is the best theology

It was one of those rare experiences that come unsought, echoing the mystic Meister Eckhart: "We see God through the same eye God sees us. Our eye and God's eye are one."

It later brought to mind a quote my friend Larry McCauley shared with me from the play "Cyrano de Bergerac": "There comes a 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!"

I think these moments of grace, when the world appears as a sacrament and we realize that everything everywhere is working together for everyone's good, come to all of us. Maybe once, maybe a few times, and never for long — but we never forget them. These sacred instances of soul seeing keep us going.

It is time to say goodbye to the column. But not to soul seeing.

The world remains charged with grace. The treasures are still hidden in the field. Beauty still waits to be seen. Christ still plays in everyday places. Love still shines through ordinary faces.

The invitation has always been the same: to see with the eye of the soul what has been there all along. Love. Forgiveness. Gratitude. Kindness. Harmony. Oneness. Beauty. Truth. And all that jazz.

Thank you for seeing with me.

"Here's lookin' at you," kids!

Read this next: NCR Spirituality section brings in expanded team of Scripture for Life theologians