

“Two Faces” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 6 – July 9, 2023

- I. **Romans 7:19; 24-25** - ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
- II. **I once read a story about an artist in the Middle Ages.**
 - a. It was a fictional story by Michael O'Brien called Sophia House... and I may have used this illustration in the past, but it fits very well into today's text.
 - b. The story is about a famous young painter was commissioned to paint a mural above the altar of a huge cathedral in Paris.
 - i. The mural was about the life of Christ – from His birth through His death and resurrection.
 - ii. The artist spent many years painting the elaborate scenes, and it became known as the marvel of its time... but there was one strange feature that people didn't understand.
 - iii. The artist, no matter how much he prayed and tried to come up with inspiration, could not complete two faces: the Christ Child and Judas Iscariot.
 1. Many times he painted temporary versions, but they always seemed out of place and needed to be removed.
 - c. Quite some time passed, and as he walked on the streets of the city, he saw some kids playing... and there was a boy who had the face of an angel... it was like he radiated goodness.
 - i. So, the artist quickly found the boy's parents and invited him to sit as the model of the Christ Child.
 - ii. His masterpiece was almost complete – but the face of Judas was the final part.
 - d. The artist made a public appeal to see if anyone could be “Judas” in the painting.
 - i. Lots of people thought they might be the face... and men came to see him from all over...
 - ii. No one had the right face... because he wanted someone who instantly gave the impression of depravity and sin... people would almost have to look away from the face.
 - e. Some years passed, and the artist kept going to church, looking up at the mural and praying for inspiration... but he began to lose hope that no one could look that evil to be the perfect model.
 - i. Then one afternoon as he sat in the church, a beggar staggered down the aisle and knelt at the steps of the altar.
 - ii. He reeked, and his clothing was all torn up, and even though he wasn't that old – it looked like he had lived a hundred years – he was all hunched over from some unknown weight – some kind of dark burdens and memories he couldn't shake.

- iii. His face was exactly what the artist had been looking for... so he convinced the broken man to come to his house.
 - 1. He did his best to restore him – feeding him, washing his clothes, treating his skin infections, and being kind to him.
 - 2. Yet, for some reason, he was silent and uncommunicative.
- f. The painter spent several weeks perfecting the painting of his “Judas” – but the beggar kept wanting to see the painting, always looking away in disgust and visibly sad.
 - i. Finally, the artist put his brush down and said, “You look really troubled, what’s going on?”
 - ii. The man started to cry ... and finally, after weeks of silence... he blurted out, “Don’t you remember me? Years ago, I was your model for the Christ Child.”¹
- g. Although this story is fiction – it is the two faces we each carry – the saint who is made perfect by Christ’s work, and the sinner who is born with evil and brokenness.
 - i. Perhaps for some of us it is like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – the good in us shows up much of the time, but the evil in us comes out sometimes too.

III. **Paul writes about the struggle we have as both saints and sinners.**

- a. It begins with a difficult reading from last week that defends the Law of God as a good thing that is corrupted by our sinful nature.
 - i. We see the Law as God’s rules, or even God condemning us for not living up to it, but the truth is that God’s Law is holy and good.
 - ii. Unfortunately, while we are still in the world, our sinful flesh is constantly fighting against God with our desires and rebellion...
 - iii. In fact, Paul says in Galatians 5:17 – “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” – or the sin you want to do.
- b. What we are getting here is a good dose of both / and...
 - i. I know it doesn’t always make sense how God works, or the Bible should somehow make it easier for us to understand – but Paul is saying that we are saints by the good work Jesus did for us, while at the same time sinners in the flesh.
 - ii. On the one hand, Paul regularly says that we are saved and free from sin, but here in this passage he declares the truth of all Christians in the world – we are still sinful people.
- c. Paul then goes into the struggle for doing the right thing versus evil – and it is a constant battle.
 - i. It’s the old example of telling a person not to think about something – or do something – and all they can think about is what they shouldn’t be doing!

- ii. Don't cuss... oops! Don't eat bad food... oops! Don't gossip... oops!
- iii. It becomes very clear that wherever the Law calls us into line with God's will, we become obsessed with why we cannot do something different.
- d. Paul knows the struggle himself – as he tells us that he doesn't do the good things he wants to do... but does the bad things he doesn't want to do.
 - i. Like us, Paul wants to follow God's will... His Law found in the 10 Commandments... not to be saved, but because our love for God brings out a desire to follow Him.
 - 1. Yet, at every turn we find ourselves stumbling along, with our sinful nature right there at our side (vs 21).
 - 2. If our great hero in the faith, St. Paul, struggles in this way with sin – he even calls himself the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15) – how can we expect to do better?
- e. No, Paul points to the only Way to get through – Jesus.
 - i. The chief of sinners verse actually begins with, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost (1Tim 1:15)
 - ii. So our reading today ends with “Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (vss 24-25)

IV. **There is no hope without the saving grace of Jesus Christ.**

- a. Yes, we all have two faces – the ugly traitor in Judas... and the reflection of the perfect Christ.
- b. The desires of our flesh are constant and can be overwhelming, but Jesus says, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)
 - i. Just as the man who modeled Judas had some great weight upon him that was crushing him... Jesus comes to lift the burden off.
- c. Each week, we spend time in careful thought – confessing our sins and seeking God's forgiveness and restoration (actually many times a day, but in church on Sundays especially).
 - i. The words, “I forgive you” strike at the heart our faith – these words have meaning because God is the speaker – “You are not guilty... I forgive you for your sins.”
- d. Jesus, the one who died for our forgiveness, would not have our sin take us away... but calls us into faith so that our identity is not only sinner... but most importantly – saint.
- e. We are forgiven and righteous by the power of God... and thanks be to God through Jesus that our sinful flesh no longer has power over us!
- f. Each of us will struggle to do the good we want to do for God until the day we die... that is a given.
- g. But rest assured, through faith in Jesus Christ, we stand forgiven. Amen.

¹ Source: Michael D. O'Brien, Sophia House (Ignatius Press, 2005)