

THROUGH THE MIRROR

A lot of young people these days, including my son Narek are into graphic novels. They are sort of like a cross between a comic book and a novel, giving you a meaty story, but broken up and enhanced by great illustrations. I was a bit skeptical of the genre, thinking it was just marketing spin to make comic books seem more respectable, until our friend Lauren and her kids came. They gave Narek a graphic novel on Greek mythology, an awesome book with ancient stories that still have deep truths to convey to us today.

One particular myth, Narcissus, relates to today's reading from St. John and will help us unlock its meaning for us today. As many of you recall Narcissus was renowned for being handsome—like the George Clooney (or the Fr. Hovnan) of the ancient world. But he was so vain and self-absorbed that he spurned all those who tried to love him. As a result, one of the gods drew him to a pool of water where he fell in love with his own reflection, staring at it until he died. Conventional wisdom has it that this is a story about vanity, and it is, but this is staying on the surface of things. The depths of this story get to the depths of what it is to be human, and along with today's scripture reading, remind us of something fundamental to living a significant and joyful life.

You see the problem with Narcissus, and all of us, is not strictly that we look too often at ourselves, the problem is that if we are always looking at ourselves, we are not looking through ourselves to see the image of God-within us and all of creation. Or put another way, the problem with Narcissus was not looking in the mirror, but that the mirror he looked in was not powerful enough to show him who he, you and I really are. For that we need a more powerful mirror, and in today's Epistle reading, John the Evangelist provides us with one. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are...Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." 1 Jn 3:1-3

John's epistle reading, as all scripture, is a holy mirror. So too is our worship our saints and sacraments. Gaze into any one of these mirrors and we will indeed see ourselves, but over time we will begin to see much more. Over time, by God's grace, our own image will give place to the image of God in ourselves and all the people and things in our lives.

So Narcissus' main problem, our main problem is not our vanity per se. The problem is in the mirrors we choose and the way that we see. Perhaps a modern day version of Narcissus will help illustrate this point. A miserable old man visits a monk to find peace. The monk takes his hand and leads him to a window, and says "Look out there." The man looked into the street. "What do you see?" asked the monk. "I see men, women, and children," answered the man. Again the monk takes his hand and this time leads him to a mirror. "Now what do you see?" "Now I see myself," the man replied. Then the monk said, "Behold, in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, but see only yourself."

We all have some silver or gold on our mirrors that tricks us into seeing only what our egos wish us to see. Tricks us into seeing our shells instead of our souls, and the image of God within. What is this silver that catches your eye and soul? Does it trick you into thinking you will never have enough? Does it trick you into looking out for number one instead of giving yourself to others? Does it trick you into thinking you are superior to others and judging those around you?

The evil one has many ways to trick us into worshipping our own image instead of the image of God within. But this church, St. Hagop Armenian Church of Pinellas Park, FL is a Godly mirror that helps us remember and recall who we most deeply are. One of the greatest ways that being a part of a church forms us, is by disciplining us to always look beyond ourselves. We want to have our own slow Sunday morning. Church makes us get up and give it to God. We want to take care of our own needs. Church always makes us aware of those more needy. We want to focus on making money. Church encourages us to give it away. We want to do things our own way, church, especially committee work, forces us to let go of having our way.

You see, Christ's Church—reflecting Christ himself—is the great antidote to Narcissism, and in today's society we need this cure even more than ever. In this age of Narcissus, we might spend our entire lives looking at ourselves as self-made men and woman. Our church and faith reflect back a different image. So let us wake up from our hypnosis and spend time before the powerful mirrors of our maker. Gazing into the mirrors of Scriptures, church and prayer we will stop looking for what we have already been given and come to know ourselves for all the Lord has created us to be; now and always, amen.