

Selfie Test

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you"—2 Cor 13:5-6

Last week I had you all pull out your smartphones and acknowledge that, like it or not, this device plays a big role in your life. It takes calls, receives messages and takes care of banking and shopping. You can even turn your car on and adjust your home thermostat with it! But there is one more thing you can do with a cellphone which we didn't mention, which has had a tremendous effect on all of us—for better and for worse. You can take pictures with it. That's right, just as we pointed out last week that some of our youth will never own a watch because of smart phones, for the same reason, most will also never own a camera.

Our smart phones, which we take with us everywhere, are also extremely powerful cameras. It didn't used to be this way. It used to be you had to have a camera to take pictures, and until recently, a camera was a rather large piece of equipment, which was hard to take just anywhere. Cameras were expensive and you had to develop film into pictures, so they were only used for special occasions. For this reason, a family might have one scrapbook or box of images from the course of their lives.

But now, now we have cameras to take thousands of lasting images at any given time throughout our entire life. People take pictures of their breakfast and their cat's breakfast. Then they turn the phone around and take selfies with their breakfast and their cat's breakfast. Then they share them with the world on Pinterest, Instagram and Facebook. Now, like I shared last week, every technology has a good and bad side. The good side of all this is that families and friends who live far from each other can stay a part of each other's lives. The bad side, however—especially with overuse and especially for young people—is that it can make our lives extremely shallow. Because, before we know it, all of our time is spent capturing, and creating the outward appearance of our social media lives, leaving little time for or interest in examining our inner lives.

Today's reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds us, however, that self-examination of our hearts and our souls, of our values and our sins, is crucial for a healthy spiritual life. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" If I can say it this way, God wants us to take lots of selfies, but not the kind that your smartphone takes of your external looks; who you hang out with, what car you drive, what you eat or wear. God wants us, rather, to look at our inner selves in the mirror of prayer, of the Bible and of Church. He wants us to take deep penetrating selfies, from a variety of angles, of how we look on the inside; and how beautifully radiant we might become in the light of God's grace and love.

God invites us to take a look at ourselves with Him every evening, prayerfully looking back on the images of our day and asking ourselves; what did I do for the glory of God and good of others today? God wants us to read the Bible and other books about Him, so that we can see how the images and illustrations of a Godly life, compares to the images of our lives. God wants us to take lots of spiritual selfies before Him in his home, this church, so that we can look honestly and humbly at ourselves through our confessions. And thereby, we begin each week with a clearer picture of who we currently are, and with the gifts of God's grace, who we might yet become.

In these and myriad other ways, our scriptures, our ritual, our church fathers and mothers have always encouraged us to examine ourselves to see whether we are living in the faith. In this world of capturing and sharing every moment of our external lives and appearances in images, we ask for the wisdom to capture and share with God and our brothers and sisters every moment of spiritual challenge and growth put before us. We ask for the courage to be more concerned with the reflections of our hearts and soul rather than with our physical reflections. We ask for the grace to see what the Apostle Paul saw in today's reading; that all real self-examination, all true selfies, reveal that someone else is always in the picture with us. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith....Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" And when Jesus Christ is in the picture, we can't help but share, now and always; amen.