

## *I'm Starting With The Man In The Mirror*



Not so long ago I saw a production of *'Thriller' in London*. It is a musical about the life and music of Michael Jackson. The show included Jackson's bestselling hit, *'the Man in the Mirror'*. As the performance concluded I spilled out into the streets of London's theatre-land and into Soho.... the place I always see the face of Christ. My theological college placement church was at the iconic Saint Anne's Church, Soho. It was here that I formed most fully into the priest I am today. I think that was because I learned to apply the Benedictine principle of seeing Christ in the face of

others and being Christ-like to them. I remember walking the streets at night with my mentor, the then Rector of St Anne's. Each time we met a person he honoured both the humanity and divinity in each of them... in the sex workers, the tourists, the locals - old and young, the gay guys, the drug addicts and on the list went. But I shall always remember the homeless guy sat in the doorway of Jerrys store... his face completely blank, almost lifeless. As the Rector spoke with him...giving no money but instead the greater gifts of time and honouring this man's humanity ...the homeless guy's face transformed before me...his eyes shone...his face animated... and in that face was the presence of the Christ more clearly than I think I have ever experienced. In the cameo, both Rector and homeless guy were simultaneously being face and mirror...as Christ and reflecting Christ.

If you wind your way through Soho and eventually find a way into St Anne's you will discover, despite having an enormous Christopher Wren clock tower, a small but beautiful chapel. The chapel occupies the place of its bombed-out predecessor. Inside, you will find as a focal point a very distinctive cross donated by a German sculptor. For me that cross is precious and reminds me of my priestly formation and the imperative to see Christ in all I encounter. If you look carefully at the cross, you will see Christ is not alone. The sculptor etched into the piece another face and that face is towards the foot of the cross. For me that face represents all the faces I have met in my ministry, especially in

Soho. When I gaze upon the Christ on that cross I simultaneously gaze on the face that is them. And maybe too that cross is a mirror in which I see both the human face and the face of Christ reflecting from me.

As I write, Easter approaches and the Stations-of-the-Cross are in my mind. One of the stations is more legend than biblically based but holds deep truths and encapsulates much at the heart of Christianity. It is where Jesus meets Veronica (which means true image) and amidst hostile faces he sees her face that looks with pity, compassion and perhaps love upon him. It was to her he gave a true image of his face. In Graham Greene's book, '*Monsignor Quixote*', *the priest calls the human face' the mirror image of God.'* We are smiled upon by the invisible God and this is reflected in our faces...so in acting with compassion maybe the true image given to Veronica was her own face...reflecting Christ.

During the celebration service for the last 25 years of the ministry of The John Young Foundation, the wise Bishop Gordon reminded us of the distinction between cure and healing which may be synonymous but not always. My experience of healing both in others and in myself has come about when I seriously practice what I learned in Soho and what is the heart of my Benedictine spirituality; healing is brought about when I see Christ in the other and seek to shape myself to be Christ- like. If as a result of the legacy of The John Young Foundation many people seek to do this, then the Lord's healing will flood our communities. Dominican writer Fr Timothy Radcliffe says, '*It belongs to the ministry of every baptized person to be the face of Christ in the*

*ordinary interactions of everyday life.*' Of course being Christ-like takes time and introspection, prayer and sacrament; of being in the presence of God... and so back to Michael Jackson and his song where this meander began:

*I'm Starting With The Man In  
The Mirror  
I'm Asking Him To Change  
His Ways  
And No Message Could Have  
Been Any Clearer  
If You Wanna Make The World  
A Better Place  
Take A Look At Yourself And  
Then Make A Change*

Father Jason Phillips

Parish Priest of Whittington, Weeford and Hints

*"Your Face, O Lord, I seek": seeking the Face of Jesus must be the longing of all of us Christians; indeed, we are "the generation" which seeks his Face in our day, the Face of the "God of Jacob". If we persevere in our quest for the Face of the Lord, at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, he, Jesus, will be our eternal joy, our reward and glory for ever: "Sis Jesu nostrum gaudium, qui es futurus praemium: sit nostra in te gloria, per cuncta semper saecula". (Pope Benedict XVI)*