

The Image we Portray vs. The Image we Are
A reflection from Brian Wigger, Pastoral Associate

Just the other day I came across an advertisement on YouTube about taking the perfect selfie. In it, the young woman described how essential it is in “this day and age” to have the right image out there, one that would involve no wrinkle nor blemish, and have just the perfect lighting, with no filter needed. All you had to do was download this particular app and purchase this device that you’d place over the camera lens on your phone, and voila, the perfect selfie would be taken!

Having the perfect image out there isn’t just a sentiment for our time. In fact, the fear of exposure of our true selves is age old, captured quite well in the story we hear of Adam and Eve found in Genesis. It may well have been that eating the forbidden fruit of the tree was more of an “image conscious” even then anything, in which humanity feared and rejected who they were before God, ultimately hiding from the exposure that such nakedness could cause.

Ah, what fear of exposure – none of us want to be exposed before one another. None of us like the thought of being exposed. Everything in our culture cries out for our attention to wear the perfect outfit, to have the perfect body and hairstyle, to appear ageless, wrinkle-free, without blemish – to have the perfect image, appearing as if there were no filter. With Adam and Eve, we hide and hope against hope not to be called out. All we need is the app! We can so easily hide through filters created by our past, filters of our own biases and assumptions, all of which are filters rooted in fear and ultimately distort that perfect selfie, that perfect image that God really wants exposed in the world.

Could this be what got Jesus into trouble? Could it be that Jesus himself was, indeed, truly image conscious, but not in the way that everybody else was or is? It was his image-consciousness that caused people to think he was “out of his mind,” as we hear in the Gospel. He was the one in need of a filter, a filter that would narrow and tame his preaching and teaching, that would narrow his inclusive action and ministry, for he was conscious of the image of God that needed to be exposed in all of humanity and all of creation, and it was out of this image that he operated. It was out of this image that he encountered. Such image-consciousness is indeed maddening in a world that more and more feeds on division in difference, rather than unity and wholeness in the midst of diversity.

St. Paul tells us, “Not to be discouraged, that our outer self is wasting away and our inner self is being renewed each day.” In other words, the point of our lives as followers of Christ is to expose this nature of the various forms our “selfies” take, to allow them to waste away in order for the true self in God to come to light and not to fear this exposure to the light of Christ.

Such exposure happens in a process we call Eucharist, in which we dare to hold up an image of our brokenness found in bread and proclaim to the world that some how God acts, moves, and transforms this brokenness into the loving, Real Presence of Christ to

be shared by all. Surely it is maddening to think about. Surely, we are and must be out of our minds. Even so and even more, by virtue of our baptism, we have the mind of Christ.