

God's face revealed: vulnerable and crucified

Our faces reveal a lot about us. Whether we are happy or sad, friendly or hostile, angry or at peace, compassionate or self-righteous, hopeful or in despair, somehow these moods and dispositions are revealed in our faces, even if we are unaware of them. The face often provides a reliable window into our heart and soul.

As we move into the solemn mood of Holy Week, I invite you to spend time gazing with great love in your heart and with wonder at the face of our Lord Crucified. Let this gentle and tortured face speak to your heart.

Matthew's Passion account today powerfully describes the face and heart of God revealed. After Jesus gave up his spirit, "the veil in the temple was *torn in two from top to bottom*". God is no longer mysterious and hidden behind that veil. In this complete tearing of the veil, the heart and soul of God is fully revealed once and for all – in the face of the crucified Jesus. It is the face of total unconditional love and surrender to us, and of nonviolence towards us.

That God in the person of Jesus had chosen to be this vulnerable to us tells us that God would rather take violence from us than do violence to us in just punishment. Only the one with the greatest of love for us is free and willing to do this. Even the most extreme form of violence done to Jesus is not sufficient to stop God from continuing to love us. The cross is the most potent declaration of God's total love for us.

The Church has refreshingly rediscovered this face of God anew in recent times. This is a great grace indeed. Especially towards the end of his Pontificate, Pope John Paul II apologised for the religious excesses, religious wars, and persecution of people done in God's name in our history. Pope Benedict XVI emphatically continued this direction with his first major teaching in his Encyclical Letter "God is Love". It is a message directed not only to all believers in the Church, but it is also a challenge to all those who do violence in the name of any religious faith. It is this vision of God's all-encompassing love that has led the Church to oppose all forms of violence, and to defend the dignity of human life from its beginning to its end.

The late Art Buchwald, the beloved American humorist, was asked whether he had any religious belief. He replied: "I believe there is a God but he's not the one all the religions claim. The Christian religion, the Jewish religion, the Muslim religion – if you believe in their God, other people will say you are an infidel. There's a God out there but not the one that causes all the trouble in the world. The people who fight all the wars – not just Iraq but all over – believe that their God told them to."

He was certainly spot-on in rejecting the God of violence. The Cross and the Crucified Jesus will always be the measuring stick against our own beliefs about God. Let the crosses we wear on our bodies be not just expensive decorative ornaments or fashion statements. Let them be declarations of who we believe God is – the God who is love and nonviolent. And let our hearts be shaped by this God.