

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P Almighty and eternal God, you know our problems and our weaknesses better than we ourselves. In your love and by your power help us in our confusion and, in spite of our weakness, make us firm in faith; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen

SECOND READING: Philemon 1-21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-- and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother-- especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

GOSPEL: Luke 14:1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

On a typical morning, most of us rise from our beds and shuffle into the bathroom.

It's our first stop of the day.

Invariably, we'll spend at least a few minutes glaring at ourselves in the mirror.

Sometimes It's not a pretty sight, given what a bed does to our hair and what minimal clothing can do to highlight our various body bulges and skin imperfections.

Add to that some puffy eyes.

Things can quickly improve, however, when you shower, comb through that hair, slap on deodorant and put on appropriate clothing and maybe some makeup.

That is, of course, until you grab your phone and open a social media app like Facebook or Snapchat or check the news for the latest celebrity gossip.

There you notice all the smiling, perfectly airbrushed faces that confront you every day.

You think about posting a selfie (who doesn't these days?), but you're worried that you'll have to present the world with your real face, which you're certain is no match for the beautiful people online or even your friend's smiling pics from Aruba.

Not to worry — there's an app for that!

With a photo filter like Facetune or the editing features of Snapchat, you can do a little tweaking.

Erase that mole, nip and tuck that spare tire, get a little creative around the eyes and *voila!*

You have just put your best selfie self out into the world.

All is well ... until you look in the mirror again.

Then disconnect between your real self and your virtual self begins to sink in.

In the age of the selfie, medical professionals have identified a new phenomenon called "body dysmorphic disorder," or Snapchat disorder, to put it more colloquially.

As *The Journal of the American Medical Association* describes it: "The pervasiveness of these filtered images can take a toll on one's self-esteem, make one feel inadequate for not looking a certain way in the real world, and may even act as a trigger for body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)."

Some people become so enamored with their virtual selves that they seek help, not from a psychologist but from a plastic *surgeon who can help them look more like their altered selfies.*

According to the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, the number of patients seeking this kind of selfie-altering surgery continues to increase year after year.

We live in a culture where getting real about ourselves is often a challenge.

Altering our bodies to fit a vision of perfection can be damaging, but what happens when we do the same thing to our spiritual beings?

If it's possible to have a dysmorphic conflict between the real and virtual selves we present to the world, it follows that the ways in which we think and behave in other areas can have the same disconnect.

We might sculpt our personalities and social postures to appeal to others and make us seem like more than we really are, rather than being humble and honest about our flaws and our human needs.

When we have this kind of spiritual dysmorphia, it becomes easier to see others as inferior to our inflated and airbrushed selves.

Jesus, however, had a tendency to drop into people's lives, cut through the airbrushed veneer and hold up a mirror to expose the true self.

He did it not from a position of superiority (even though he was God in the flesh) but from the position of one who, despite his fully human and fully divine nature, was humble and always projected his authentic self.

He was such a contrast to the other religious leaders of his day, who were all about keeping up appearances.

At a Sabbath banquet in the home of one such leader, Jesus addressed the problem of spiritual dysmorphia and challenged the people around the table to get real about who they were and who God wanted them to be.

According to Luke, at the meal the Pharisees were "watching [Jesus] closely" (v. 1).

While it was expected that a virtuous host would invite a prominent teacher to dinner, it was clear that the host's motives here were suspect.

We know that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and the cross and there would be plenty of prominent religious leaders who would want to trip him up and find a way to get rid of him.

Everything Jesus said would be analyzed and scrutinized, but time and again his words were consistent with his actions.

Jesus noticed a lot of jockeying for position at the table as different people vied for the place of honor (v. 7).

In response, he told a parable about a wedding banquet which, on the surface, seems to be a kind of Emily Post-style instruction on etiquette but, in reality, is much more.

That Jesus talked about a “wedding banquet” may indicate a larger agenda here.

In different places in the Scriptures, the wedding banquet sometimes serves as a symbol for the coming kingdom of God, as it does here in Luke (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:6-9).

Jesus seemed to be warning his fellow dinner guests that their striving for a place of honor at God’s table was a projection of their airbrushed image of themselves.

The person who is real and honest with himself or herself will choose the lowest place and let the host set the agenda for who sits where (v. 10).

It’s the host, in this case God, who determines our place at the table, for it is God who sees the real person behind the altered public veneer.

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (v. 11).

The second parable Jesus tells is directed at the host and, if we connect the two parables, Jesus seems to be defining who the more “distinguished” guests are who should have prominent places at the table.

“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors,” says Jesus (v. 12).

To do so was expected as part of a social transaction — you invite them and they have to invite you.

It’s the same kind of social contract we expect to execute in the selfie world — you click “like” on someone else’s fake portrait or news about themselves and you expect them to like your altered life as well.

But Jesus urges the host, as he urges us, to instead elevate those who cannot reciprocate and to engage with those to whom our dysmorphic self-images don’t matter.

It’s in relationship to the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind that our real self-image comes into focus.

We learn that while we may not be in dire economic or physical circumstances, we too are poor, crippled, lame and blinded by self-interest and self-indulgence.

Our smartphone cameras have a toggle icon.

Tap it and it switches from selfie view to world view.

The image you see is either of yourself, or that which is beyond yourself.

Jesus wants us to toggle our lens so that what we see is everything beyond ourselves.

When we turn from staring at ourselves to serving others we begin to get a good sense that God gives “likes” to those who are humble, honest and authentic about themselves and in their relationships to others.

“You will be blessed” in inviting them, says Jesus, “because they cannot repay you.

Many people suffering from Snapchat dysmorphia focus their whole lives on impressing their friends to the detriment of their own bodies and souls.

Jesus reminds us that the most impressive people in God’s kingdom are those who take the humble position, who turn the focus away from self to others.

But It’s not about presenting a pious image. Many of us tout about our great humility.

It is caring only about turning the spotlight on the image of God in others and in ourselves.

It’s about mirroring God’s gracious love. A love that accepts us as we are, even with bed head, no shave or makeup.

What makes for beautiful in the kingdom of God is humility and love for others. No surgery required!

God our fountain of living water: We worship and adore your holy presence among us. Without you, we have no future. As you led your servant Jeremiah to be faithful to you and your word, so we pray that we may remain faithful to you and your word.

God our strength: We open our mouths to sing songs of joy to you. Whenever we walk in your ways, it is like you blessing us with the finest of wheat and honey from the rock you satisfy us.

Holy LORD: As you have loved us, so you have called us to love. As you have shown us your hospitality, so you instruct us to show hospitality to strangers. As you remember those in prison and who are tortured, so you have told us to remember those in prison and be in solidarity with those who are being tortured.

Jesus our host and guest: You teach us to live life as your humble servants that those who humble themselves will be exalted. You were the perfect humble servant and now you are exalted above everyone in heaven. Pour out your spirit of hospitality upon us that we may welcome, feed, and serve the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind .

Jesus our healer: We remember all among us who are ill in body, mind, or spirit, especially those whom we name before you now either aloud or in the silence of our hearts: PAUSE.

Heavenly king: We pray for all who govern and serve in public offices and are in positions of authority. Bestow on them all your grace and wisdom to govern with justice and uphold peace for all peoples.

Into your all-sufficient hands we commend all for whom we pray and ask that you would grant whatever else is in accord with your holy will and purposes, through Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.