

Good Friday 2006
“Woman, Behold Your Son”
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As he was dying on the cross, Jesus called us to behold one another and he entrusted us to each other.

I remember as a child being repeatedly reminded by my parents to “look people in the eyes when you speak to them.” More often than not, what I remember doing is looking at my shoes, while I shook hands and mumbled a hello. As adults, we get better at this, and we understand the value of good eye contact and a firm handshake. But to “behold” someone is entirely different.

In the Gospel of John, we hear: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

To “behold” is to “gaze upon.” It is used as an imperative to call attention. How often do we take the time to “gaze upon” anyone?

I was washing dishes one mornig when my then three-year-old daughter Rachel came into the kitchen with a proud, “ta-da!” I glanced over from the sink for a moment to see her wearing at least four or five beaded necklaces, a tiara, and my high-heeled shoes. “Aren’t I beautiful?” she asked.

Now, I, having read plenty of parenting books, and convinced that my daughter’s self-esteem would not be tied to physical beauty, turned back to the sink, and launched into my already standard speech. I explained that it’s not what’s on the outside, but what’s on the inside that matters. I said it doesn’t matter how people look on the outside. Right? And as I turned to get her response, I saw that she had stepped out of the shoes, and taken off the necklaces. She said, “Never mind, Mom,” and looked up at me with such sadness and disappointment that all I could do was scoop her into my arms.

I started watching people a little closer then, really looking into their eyes. There are times when I think all of us are surprised to look into our loved ones’ eyes. We’re surprised that their eye color seems a little bit different than we remember, or the folds of their lids have changed. Maybe they suddenly look older or younger, wiser, or more fragile.

With such a terrible cold and flu season, our seven-year-old son, Zachary, was recently diagnosed with pneumonia. As I carried him from the car to the doctor's office and watched him lie listlessly on the examination table, I held his eyes as he breathed with tremendous effort. He smiled at me so trustingly, and with such weariness in his eyes, that I was overwhelmed.

But beholding one another doesn't simply mean to look into the eyes of those closest to us. We are called to gaze into the eyes of the two-year-old East African girl, dying of starvation, whose face appeared on the front page of the paper several weeks ago. We are called to gaze upon the homeless who lived in our school gym, and the volunteers who made it possible.

Because if we are entrusted to each other, we must first see each other, gaze upon each other, behold one another. Only then can we truly be entrusted to each other so as to reflect to each other what Jesus reflected to the world, which is the love of God. We are called to reflect the love of God to each other as we behold one another.

Each of us has had an experience of reflecting God's love, perhaps as a parent or a child, as a spouse, partner, or friend, maybe as a neighbor or a member of a parish community. When have we felt entrusted to another like John and Mary at the foot of the cross? When have we taken responsibility for those entrusted to our care? We see the early followers of Jesus taking up Jesus' call, caring for the sick, the hungry, and the widowed. Maybe we have reflected God's love in acts of social justice, or in companionship and caring, or even through our own discernment or the discernment of those around us.

Maybe, like my nephew, a twenty-five year old officer in Iraq, who is processing the eighth divorce among his troops, we are entrusted to support others in difficult times. Maybe, like our school children, we are entrusted with giving hope and encouragement through hurricane relief efforts. Or maybe, like my husband and I, we have been part of small faith communities here at Christ the King. Over the years, we have tried to reflect for each other the love of God. We have discerned with each other whether our involvement in law or medicine, education or politics, advocacy and prayer have been life-giving or whether we've needed to change directions in each of our own lives.

To be entrusted to each other is a joyous, but awesome responsibility. We have been charged by Jesus, at the very hour of his death, to care for one another and to reflect God's love to each other. Each of us is entrusted to the other. And so Jesus calls us: "Behold one another."