



Advent Reflection for Monday, December 13

Geoffrey Kurtz

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

St Paul's rat-a-tat prepositions leave me disoriented, dazzled: "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It's like walking down Church Avenue on a December evening, with light reflecting on or shining from things on every side: puddles, streetlamps, windshields, traffic signals, headlights, apartment windows, storefronts. Where should I be looking? What just flashed by?

Here's a curious question that my son is fond of pondering. Can I be sure that what you experience as, say, "green" is the same visual sensation I name with that word? It's a way of asking, "Can any of us get direct access to, unmediated connection with, another's mind or heart?" The answer to either version of the question, of course, is no.

Yet – somehow, we connect.

"Only connect," writes E.M. Forster. But it's never that simple. What does it take for me, for any of us, to connect with, to open toward, to know and meet the needs of another? The sentimental answer goes something like this: I can connect with you, know you, serve you, because I can see into your heart, and so I can see your goodness and can serve you, so that you receive a goodness that matches your own.

I'm skeptical. My vision just isn't that good. There's too much glare, too much shadow. As St Paul (no sentimentalist, he) reminds us in his other letter to the Corinthians, we don't see "face to face"—at least not here, now, yet. If there's truth in the sentimental answer, it can't be more than a half-truth.

Whose face do I see when I look at you? If it's yours alone, then my service to you, my connection with you, is all about who you are (and who I am). That's a fragile basis for our connection, given the darkness I know is within me and the darkness between us that makes it hard for me to see you clearly. But St Paul makes a wild, unsettling, sky-opening claim: "we proclaim...ourselves as your slaves for Jesus'

sake.” He seems to be saying: If I look at you, opening myself to the possibility of being for you, then an unexpected light may shine. I may see in your face not only your own features—not only what makes you new and particular, deserving or undeserving—but also a face I’ve seen before, the face of someone I’ve met “in Scripture and the breaking of bread” (as an old prayer puts it).

In your face: the face of Christ. In the face of Christ: something that moves and upends me, confronts and comforts me – something St Paul calls “glory”. In that glory: a hint, a clue, about God.

To serve another “for Jesus’ sake”: What does it feel like to reflect that kind of love? How are my vision and my actions changed if Christ becomes the connector, the window, the mediator, between me and you? What does St Paul expect that I’ll learn about God if I see Jesus’ face in yours?

Again, I’m disoriented, dazzled. If there are answers to these questions, I’m waiting for them.

May Advent teach me how to wait. Wait with me?

Geoff lives in Kensington with his wife, Alyson, and their children, Miriam, Lewis, and Ginger. Along with various combinations of family members, he has been attending Holy Apostles since early autumn (after having drifted through a few times over the previous few years).

