

The Face of God in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

“To love another person is to see the face of God.”

So ends the dramatic musical *“Les Miserables,”* an epic tale of sin and redemption, crime and punishment, love and loss, promises made, kept and broken, and the struggles that bring forth the best and worst of human nature.

I have long been a fan of musical theater, with a soft spot for the rollicking, happy musicals that end in the burst of a joyful finale for all. Yet, I have also come to appreciate those tales that show, through the strains of haunting lyrics, the more complex nature of human life and experience. If anything, *Les Mis* is complex!

That beautiful snippet of lyric touched my heart when I first heard it and it echoes through my mind often. I have written it in anniversary cards of those couples whose love truly does show the face of God to those of us blessed to know them. I have slipped it into wedding toasts for loved ones, with the hope that in their vocation of love they will show the face of God to each other. It has crossed my mind during those blessedly frequent times when I have been on the receiving end of a profound kindness that lets me see in another a glimpse of the face of God.

Of all the things we might do in this life, it strikes me that very little can be as important as loving our neighbors not merely as ourselves, but loving our neighbors in a way that shows to them the face of God, especially when they most need to see it. Even though the best of our love is a pale shadow of the divine, it is accessibly tangible.

Lately, though, I have been wondering if the corollary is also true. If *“to love another person is to see the face of God,”* I have wondered whether it must also be true that when we fail to love each other, we make it harder for others to see the face of God. I have wondered this of late because I see the world in the throes of some of the most bitter divisions I have seen. I see the stress of an election season where more voters seem to be voting *against* someone instead of *for* someone. I notice the fearful fatigue of a season of COVID that has lasted longer than so many expected. I am saddened by the vicious echo-chambers of social media and the painful injustices that many suffer or inflict. I know the disruption of routines and the way, of necessity, people have been separated from their loved ones when they need them close.

In this mix – perhaps both caused by it and escalating it – I have seen a _____. In a time of tension, angst, and conflict, only the most naïve would say _____. But, there is still the opportunity to show each other love. We may not love, like, accept or even respect viewpoints, arguments, political choices _____. Some practices and acts are now, as they have always been objectively evil and deserving of condemnation. But, yet, that does not mean that to detest these messages must mean that there can be no love for the messenger.

So ... when _____. But, ask yourself first, whether you can love another person so they see the face of God.

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