

JULY 5, 2020

Once upon a time there was a young prince...he was very handsome except for one thing : he had a crooked back.

This birth defect caused him great sorrow...it also kept him from being the kind of prince that he really wanted to be for his people.

One day the prince's father (the king) asked the best sculptor in his kingdom to make a statue of the prince, however, it should show him with a straight back, not a crooked one , for the king wanted his son to see himself as he could be.

When the sculptor finished the statue it was truly magnificent. It was so lifelike that you could easily mistake for the prince, and the king placed the statue in the prince's private garden.

Each day, when the prince went to the garden to study, he looked longingly at the statue...one day , he realized that whenever he looked at this statue , his heart beat faster and his body tingled.

Months passed - soon the people began to say to one another "the prince's back doesn't seem as crooked as it once did" and when the prince heard this, his heart beat even faster and his body tingled even more.

Now the prince began to go to the garden more often ,  
he  
spent hours standing before the statue: studying it  
closely and meditating on it.

Then , one day , a remarkable thing happened...the  
prince found himself standing as straight as the statue.

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That story is a parable about you and me ... We were also  
born to be prince-like. But we too had a defect which  
kept us from being the kind of person we were meant to  
be : that defect was human nature.

But then one day, God (our king) sent his Son into our  
world ... The perfect image of what we were born to be.  
*Spiritually* he stands straight and beautiful , and when we  
look at him our heart beats faster / our body tingles / and  
we begin to dream.

But that is as far as our story goes. It is not finished yet ...  
It is still being lived out. Whether we become like Jesus or  
not is something still to be decided ... whether our story  
will have a happy ending (like the story of the prince) is  
yet to be decided.

Well what can we do to guarantee that our story will  
have a happy ending like the story of the prince??

Very simply: we must do what the prince did!!

Just as the prince studied and pondered the statue , so we must study and ponder Jesus.....just as the prince modelled himself after the statue -- we must model ourselves to be the image of Jesus.

But that is not easy to do - because we live in a world which presents too many alternatives -- comfortable alternatives.

Modeling ourselves after Jesus is not always easy --- while the alternatives may feel good , and bring some enjoyment with them (at least in earthly terms) in our hearts we know there is a better way....and so we struggle between our spiritual desires and our human desires.

St. Paul echoes this sentiment in our second reading today , he tells us that he doesn't understand himself: he does not do the things he wants to do (the things he knows he should) he does what he hates : and it aggravates him...

***" Wretched man that I am!***

***Who will rescue me from this body of death "***

*[romans 7:24]*

Previously, Paul taught that once we are baptized in Christ, the old ways and the old desires in us die. So why does he now (and why do we now) still have the urge to do what we know is wrong? Why is the temptation still there?

Well, even though we rose to a new way of life, we learn that we still sin because we have two natures: spiritual and human.

And as a result we live by two laws : the law of God and the law of this world (which some call the law of sin or the law of mortality)... And these two natures are pulling us in opposite directions -- we can see them at work all around us:

The people who are nice and friendly to everyone but who (at home) are tyrants and emotionally abusive to their family ... The folks who gather for worship Sunday morning and speak of loving their neighbour and of social justice (but who return to work Monday morning and try to foreclose on a mortgage or ring up an over-inflated sale at someone else's expense).

I even had one friend tell me about his church where the offertory hymn was "take my life" and of course the one line is:

"take my silver and my gold - not a mite would I withhold" (and how while they were singing it one Sunday ... the wealthiest man in the congregation became quite upset because the smallest bill he had was a ten , and the sidespeople wouldn't let him make change from the plate.

*(its true .. I'm not making this stuff up)*

Two natures : and then there are the folks who smile and greet one another on the street but who begin to gossip and spread rumours (as soon as they're out of earshot).

**We are a mixture of contrasts** : sometimes following the law of God (and living like members of the body of Christ) and other times reverting to our base nature (human instinct).

And to our dying day these two natures are in constant conflict -- engaged in an internal tug-of-war between trusting in god and trying to take control of things ourselves.

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Jesus also had this struggle (in the garden of Gethsemane):  
should he obey God (and proceed to the cross) or not  
(and  
try to run and save himself).....his human nature wanted  
to  
survive , but his higher self felt urged to obey.

He agonized over the choice .... he even asked the disciples to pray for him, but they gave in to their human nature and fell asleep. In the end, Jesus' godly side won when he prayed "not my will, but thy will be done"

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All of which brings me back to our opening story and the question I asked:

## **What can we do to model ourselves in the image of Christ.**

What can we do to guarantee that our spiritual nature  
will  
prevail over our human instincts:

**First** - we can make bible reading\prayer a greater part of

our daily lives. We do this instinctively on Sundays but what about during the week? It always surprises me (in a good way) when I see someone sitting in the park at lunch-time reading their bible (usually an office exec or a student)

... Taking the time to center their lives around god and re-

focus their priorities, so that their whole life may be true to

their baptismal vows and not just their Sunday mornings.

**Second** – we need to really hear the gospel. To listen to it with more than just our ears -- but also with our mind/our soul/our heart.

For example:

When Jesus says "learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"

Picture it in your mind: visualize him saying this...see the expression on his face//look into his eyes//make this story come alive...

And when he speaks, don't just think of him talking to a faceless/nameless crowd in some far-off biblical place...hear him speak directly to you by name, here and now.

And when he says "learn from me" take his words to heart  
and apply them to your own life .... do something//do

anything you can, to make his words and his life, shine through your own.

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If our life is to have a happy ending//if we are to grow into  
the image of Christ just as the prince grew into the statue's  
image// we must do what the prince did.

We must study and reflect on Jesus , just as the prince did the statue...and we must do it with every fiber of our being.  
(not in an academic way ..... but in a way that makes it real for us in this time and this place).

And if we do this, we will become like Jesus -- and our story (like the story of the prince) will have a truly happy ending ... and so will the world in which we live, and the people we encounter along the way.