

# GAZING ON THE FACE OF CHRIST

By Mary Healy

Mother of God Prayer Meeting  
September 9, 2001

Week of Prayer and Renewal-the theme is "Contemplating the Face of Christ," from the second part of *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. One of the ways God is calling us to put out into the deep is by gazing into the face of his beloved Son.

## Seek My Face

"Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek.' Hide not your face from me" ([Ps 27](#):7-9).

God tells us to seek his face. This makes sense-ever since the Garden of Eden, man has hidden from God and lost the face-to-face fellowship we had with him. What is more personal than a face? If you really look someone in the face, you are looking into the depths of the person, and at the same time revealing yourself. Do you ever avoid a person's face when you're mad at them, or afraid of them? God is telling us to seek eye contact with him, strive for personal intimacy.

But why would God *hide* his face from us? I have experienced God hiding his face from me. Maybe some others here have too. It is to teach us something he could not have taught us in any other way.

[Is 54](#):7-8: "For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer."

[Tobit 13](#):6: "If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will not hide his face from you."

## The Human Face of God

God forever showed his face to us in Jesus his Son. But what do we see in this face?

"He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" ([Is 53](#):3-5).

"Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?'" ([Mt 26](#):67-68).

Who would have thought the face of God would look like this? Everyone would have expected the face of God to be resplendent with glory, as it was at the Transfiguration.

Except for the Transfiguration, the whole life of Jesus was in a sense a hiding of his face, yet it was not really hiding, it was only a form we did not recognize. He wanted to reveal something of himself that he could *reveal* only in that way. What would have happened if Jesus had had the face of the Transfiguration during his whole lifetime? How would we ever have known his humility, and the extravagance of his love?

### ***Seeing with the Eyes of Faith***

John Paul II about Peter's confession of faith: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" ([Mt 16:17](#)). The expression 'flesh and blood' is a reference to man and the common way of understanding things. In the case of Jesus, this common way is not enough. A grace of 'revelation' is needed, which comes from the Father.... We cannot come to the fullness of contemplation of the Lord's face by our own efforts alone, but by allowing grace to take us by the hand. Only the experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery...." (*NMI*, 20).

The Pope means by "revelation" exactly what we have always meant by it in MOG: a very personal, interior work of the Holy Spirit by which we understand divine truth in a new way, a way that touches our spirit and changes our life. And our response to that is unshakable *faith*. Let us enter into this week of renewal with a deep confidence that God wants to give us revelation, he longs to reveal his face to us.

### ***Vision***

Part of the theme for this week, especially for covenanted members, is *vision*. Vision means having *God's* plan, not my plan, in view for Mother of God Community and for my life. This is why it is crucial that before setting any goals, before making decisions about service or schedules for this year, before initiating ministries and programs, we gaze on the face of Jesus.

John Paul II: "Is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium? Our witness, however, would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first *contemplated his face*" (*NMI*, 16). "We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you! It is not therefore a matter of inventing a 'new program.' The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (*NMI*, 29).

We can be so limited to what fits into our own narrow, shortsighted vision. Our unbelief and dullness of mind can limit God's power. But if we gaze on the face of Christ, we'll begin to take on God's mind. All our priorities will be realigned, our hope will be so much firmer because it won't be based on transitory things. Our most intense hope will be: "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" ([1 Cor 13:12](#)).

As we fix our eyes on the risen Christ, we begin to understand that Jesus is Lord over all things, that he has already won the victory over our sins and failures, and that no problem

in our lives is too big for him. We begin to share in the joy and peace that he came to give us. Even more, as we look on his face we begin to take on his likeness, to be transformed into him.

[2 Cor 3:18](#): "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from glory to glory; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

This week, God may call you to gaze on the face of Christ crucified, or Christ transfigured and glorified, or both. This takes place mostly through prayer and meditating on the Gospels. Another way is to meditate on an icon of Christ. Often icons are challenging. Our western images of Christ are sometimes "soft," sentimental, shallow. Real icons show the sternness, the unbearably piercing strength, of divine Love. They are windows that let you gaze into the depths.

### ***Questions for Personal Study and Small Group Discussion***

1. Read any passage in the Gospels (for instance, [Lk 5:17-26](#) or [Jn 8:2-11](#)), and meditate on the face of Christ in this story. What does your heart see in his face?
2. Read [Jn 14:9](#) and find some similar passages. How does Jesus reveal the Father?
3. Meditate on some passages (either Old Testament or New) about the passion of Christ. How is it that a face of grief and pain reveals the eternal, living, unchanging God?
4. Read [2 Cor 3:18-4:6](#). Has God shone in your heart to give the light of the face of Christ? If so, how has that changed your life?
5. Read [Mt 17:1-8](#). Why did Jesus show himself transfigured to his closest disciples before his passion and death? What does he want to show you?