

Christmas is a time of newness, of fresh starts. In Isaiah 62:2 we are called by a new name given by God. How fitting that we are reminded of this during this season of beginning. In the Gospel of John we discover that it is not through our will but by the will of God that we are given the chance to become children of God. We are chosen by God, so blessed to be loved by Him. We are all blessed even when life tells us otherwise. In the midst of high unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and war, the Grace of God seeks to sustain us. Being blessed does not mean we do not suffer. We are after all still part of the human condition. On the other hand if your life is wonderful, you have a job, food, housing etc, that does not mean that you are especially blessed by God. It does not mean that those who have little or nothing are somehow lacking. Those who preach a gospel of prosperity have somehow confused the love of God with the material rewards of the world.

It is very easy to fall into the pattern of thinking if we are good, if we do what we are told, the Lord will bless us with whatever we want. I think this might be where the gospel of prosperity may originate. When I was young I thought that I needed to be extra good, dare I say perfect, in order to please God. I spent a lot of time feeling guilty because of some perceived short coming. I wondered how could I ever be good enough to avoid all of the pitfalls of life? After so much hell fire and damnation, it was not hard to think that I'd end up doomed because of my sinful ways.

Later as I grew older (much older) I suddenly became aware of this deep, unending love. This love was not dependent on what I did or didn't do, or who I was. It was totally unearned. There was nothing I could do that would jeopardize my receiving this love. There was nothing I could do to ensure that I would keep receiving this love. It was already freely given. It was and is the love of God.

The love of God is not based on who we are, what we have, or what we do. Jesus came to reveal that even the lowly, the marginal have worth. So often during this time of the year we give to those less fortunate than ourselves. But in giving do we really see those who receive our gifts? Can we see ourselves in the faces of those in need? Can we see someone who not only deserves our compassion but also our respect? Can we see the face of Christ?

Each of us has a place where in the Holy Spirit dwells. It lies deep within the recesses of our souls. No matter who we are or what we do, this spark of the Divine exists for us to recognize it in ourselves, in each other, in every person we encounter. It is this that allows us to behold the face of Christ because we are able to acknowledge Christ within ourselves. It can and should be like looking in a mirror. What we see in our own eyes should be what we see in the eyes of others.

In this season of newness, let us start fresh. First by loving ourselves enough to allow for the love of others. Let us remember that God chooses us, loves us. It is this grace that unites us all, sustaining us as we seek to discover the Christ within. Second, let us remember that we do not have to earn the love of God. It grace pure and simple. And finally, let us remember that everyone we encounter is loved by God. This love is given to all. Remember to see the light of Christ in every face we see.