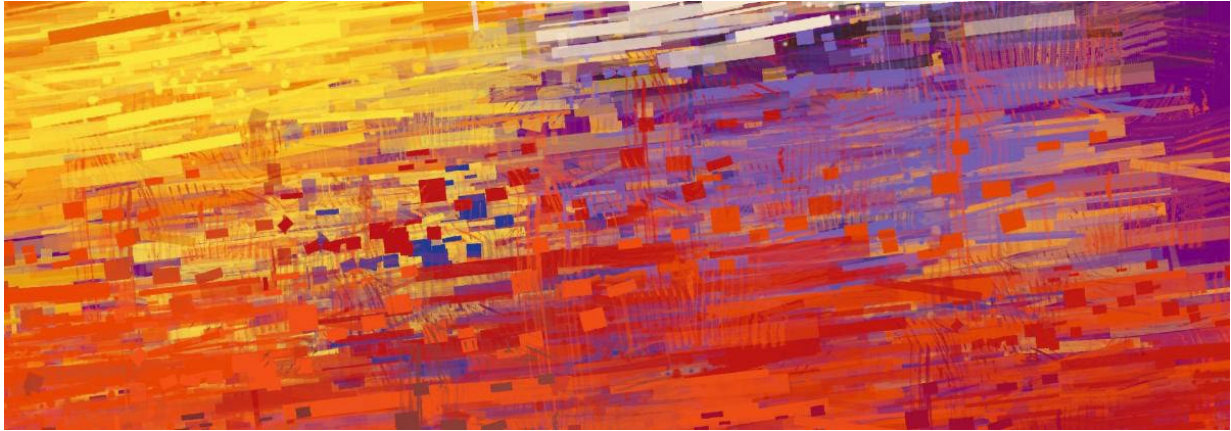




Precious Blood

SPIRITUALITY INSTITUTE



**Sharing the gifts of
Precious Blood Spirituality with the world.**



Whose Image Do You See?

Recognizing Christ In The Stranger

In a recent Sunday Gospel, Jesus held up a Roman coin and asked whose image was stamped upon it. The answer was Caesar's. But the question invites us to consider something deeper: Whose image is stamped upon us?

From the beginning of Scripture, we are told that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God.

But what happens when we encounter someone whose language, culture, or life experience is different from our own? Do we still recognize that image?

Recently, a young immigrant woman went to an appointment with immigration authorities. She didn't go alone. Members of a community that had provided her with shelter accompanied her. But she was detained.

During the night, she was transported to a detention center, far from the people who had welcomed her into their lives.

I know something of this story because I am part of that community.

What happened next was an extraordinary witness to the power of accompaniment.

The people who had welcomed her as their neighbor refused to let her face this alone. They worked with those who could help secure her release. They stayed in communication. They prepared to welcome her home. A court order was secured for her release, and her accompaniment team was ready to receive her.

What moves me most is not simply the legal intervention, important as that was. It is the love that surrounded her. The decision to accompany her to that appointment. The determination to remain beside her when she was detained. And the tenderness of recognizing that, upon her return, she would need quiet, rest, and the reassuring presence of people she trusted.

They became the image of Christ for her. And they discovered the image of Christ in her.

That is the beauty of accompaniment. It is never simply a matter of one person giving and another receiving. When we enter into genuine relationships with one another, we discover that grace moves in both directions.

Remembering the Stranger

In Exodus, God commands the Israelites not to oppress the stranger, reminding them that they themselves had once been strangers in Egypt.

God asks them to remember.

Remember what it means to be vulnerable.

Remember what it feels like to depend upon the kindness of others.

Remember what it is like to live with uncertainty about tomorrow.

And God makes a remarkable promise: when the vulnerable cry out, God will hear them.

The question for us is whether we are willing to listen.

For many years, I have accompanied immigrant communities. I have listened to their stories, shared their hopes, witnessed their struggles, and sometimes carried their fears alongside them.

Behind every political argument about immigration are real human beings. Mothers and fathers trying to provide for their children. Young people hoping for a future. Families who have made enormous sacrifices simply to survive.

Nations have laws and responsibilities. But no law, border, or political disagreement can erase the dignity of a person created in the image of God.

And that conviction must become more than something we profess. It must become something we live.

When Faith Becomes Visible

In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul praises a community whose faith has become a model for other believers. Their faith was visible in the way they lived.

I serve on the board of [Shelter in Peace](#), an organization in Alameda County that provides transitional housing and rental assistance for immigrants, refugees, and low-income families in partnership with sponsoring organizations. Its simple conviction is that everyone deserves a home. It is one of many communities where people open their doors, provide shelter, offer practical assistance, and accompany those facing frightening and uncertain circumstances.

These people may never stand at a pulpit or preach a homily. But they are preaching the Gospel with their lives.

This is especially meaningful within our Precious Blood spirituality.

Our spirituality calls us to move toward the places where relationships have been wounded, where people have been excluded, and where reconciliation is desperately needed.

Accompaniment is not simply doing something for another person. It means entering into relationship, listening, remaining present, and allowing ourselves to be changed by the encounter.

The people who accompanied this young woman did more than offer shelter. They became her neighbors. And in their relationship with her, they discovered something of the presence of Christ.

That is reconciliation taking flesh in our world.

Making Room for God

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is asked which commandment is the greatest. He responds by bringing together two teachings from the Jewish Scriptures: love God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no separation between the two.

And in the same chapter of Leviticus that commands us to love our neighbor, we are also told to love the stranger who lives among us.

Not merely tolerate the stranger. Not simply put up with the stranger.
Love the stranger as yourself.

That challenges us to look beyond the people we already know, those who think like us, worship like us, or speak our language. It asks us to recognize the image of God in the person standing before us, whoever that person may be.

We are living in challenging times. There is much that can leave us discouraged, especially when we witness the fear and suffering experienced by immigrant communities.

But we are not living without hope.

Hope is visible in those who open their doors, prepare a room, accompany someone who is afraid, and refuse to let the stranger remain a stranger.

Perhaps the question we need to ask is not simply, "Do I love God?"

But rather, **"Can I recognize the image of God in the person standing before me?"**

Because when we make room for one another, we make room for God.

Fr. Dave Matz, C.P.P.S.