

Everybody has a story. Learning somebody else's story will change the way you look at them. Therefore, we are careful about the stories we tell about ourselves because it changes how others see us. The image we project will be the story that others have of us. If you present yourself as powerful, people will think of you as powerful. If you present yourself as resourceful, you might be looked to as a key player.

This works the other way too, of course. If you present yourself as incompetent, then people will not look to you. If you get exposed as unable to control yourself—your anger, your lust, your greed—then people will think you are a bad person.

A large number of TV shows expose real-life people as being bad. The plot is predictable. Joe Schmo blended into society, but behind the façade was an evil, harmful person. One reason why this makes for compelling television is because these stories make us think, "At least I'm not like that. I've got my faults, but I've never done anything that bad." Or maybe you have, but unlike them, you've been smart enough not to get caught. Then you can say, "At least I've hidden my dirty laundry, unlike them."

It's very common, therefore, to go through life carefully projecting an image, hiding unsavory parts of your story and hoping that people will only notice the good stuff. Then you die, but the rigamarole goes on. A nice obituary gets written that hides all the bad stuff; highlights the good. Maybe a fitting epitaph for the tombstone would be: "This person successfully projected an image of being good. Nobody really knew what they were like."

This is no good. It's a lie. Hiding is a form of lying. Lying and hiding can seem like a savior. Lies can protect us from embarrassment or other consequences. That's why we do it. Lies protect us from the pain, but at a terrible cost. Lies are like poison for our souls.

If lies are poison, then the antidote is truth. Lies pretend to save, but they actually enslave. The only way to be set free is the truth. Jesus said in our reading last week, "**You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**"

Contrast that with lies. Lies say to us, "Make use of me, and I will keep you safe." "Lie and hide, and you will not get hurt." Notice that Jesus does not say anything about safety or pain. He doesn't say, "You will know the truth, and you won't get hurt." He says, "**You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**" The truth can cause pain. That is why it is often avoided. We pretend to be something we are not, because we don't want the pain of knowing our real story.

Although this strategy is understandable, it doesn't work out well. It's understandable because nobody wants to feel pain, but it's no good. The price is too high. The slavery is too oppressive. If we are living in lies, then we aren't really ourselves. It is good to be ourselves, even if that means that we aren't the image we project. It is good to be ourselves, even if that means we are weak, poor, foolish, confused, angry, lustful—what have you.

The reason why it is good to be yourself, regardless of whatever is wrong with you, is because of Jesus. Jesus came to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to the lame, freedom to the prisoners. Wouldn't it be silly for a blind person who encountered Jesus to say, "I can see great!" Or for a lame

person to say, "Look how I can jump or dance!" Jesus healed people who were really in need. They weren't faking it. They needed help, and Jesus helped them.

Here in the Christian Church we often talk about the forgiveness of sins, which is entirely proper, but sometimes we give the impression that only certain kinds of sins can be forgiven. Polite sins can be forgiven. Polite sins are the whoopsie-daisies that respectable people fall into every once in a while.

But what about those really awful ones? What about the ones that are so bad they get put on television because the stories make the viewers feel better about themselves because at least they are not as bad as that? The answer's simple: Yes, they can be forgiven. Jesus can do it. But the door—so to speak—through which that forgiveness must come is the truth. If a person doesn't want what is true, then that person doesn't want to live with Jesus. Anybody can be saved. It doesn't matter who they are or what they have done, but nobody will be saved through lies.

Imagine going to a doctor, and instead of telling the doctor what was wrong with you, you instead said, "I am super duper healthy! I've never been better!" The doctor could not be faulted for saying in response: "You seem quite well. You have no need of a physician."

We have a psalm verse that says, "**I confessed my transgressions unto the Lord, and he forgave the iniquity of my sins.**" It doesn't say, "I lied to God, and he believed me," or "I lied to God, and he didn't care; he forgave my sins anyway." No: "I confessed my very real, very embarrassing weaknesses, secrets, proclivities, what-have-you, and he forgave me."

It's kind of amazing: The truth is on our side. The truth is that God is more merciful than we can understand. The truth is that there is literally no sin that cannot be forgiven. However, that said, no servant can serve two masters. To be on God's side, is to be with the truth. If we live in lies, then we are on the devil's side. You can't be on both teams.

This is why, when a person is baptized, or when a person renews their commitment to live as a Christian, they say: "I renounce the devil." That's saying I don't want to live under the devil anymore. I want God to be my God. And they say, "I renounce all the devil's works, and all the devil's ways." That's saying I don't want lies anymore. I want truth, and this is the truth: "I need help! I'm poor, blind, helpless, confused, angry." How often in the Gospels we hear people say: "**Help me Jesus!**" And what does Jesus do? He helps them!

On this All Saints' Day, as we think about our lives—our tombstones, perhaps—I'd like to bring to your mind again that epitaph: "This person successfully hid themselves. Nobody really knew what they were like." Contrast that with the vision of heaven that we heard about in our first reading. In that vision John saw a countless multitude that nobody could number. They were gathered around the throne and around the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. They are crying out with a loud voice: "**Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!**" Why are they doing that? Because it's the truth, and they love it.

They've been saved. Their sin, though it was like scarlet, was made as white as snow. Their robes were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. What God said, they believed. God said, "I'm yours and you're mine. We belong together. Be yourself—your true self—instead of that lie you've been telling yourself and others. Be yourself, and I will make you in the self that you want to be. Follow me."

Which is better—the tombstone or the heavenly vision? It isn't hard. Lies suck. The truth is awesome.

