

# The Portrait of a Beggar

There is a story of a beggar who was sitting across the street from an artist's studio. The artist saw him and thought he would make an interesting portrait study, so from a distance he painted the defeated man whose shoulders drooped and whose eyes were downcast and sad.

When he was finished, he took the portrait over to the beggar so he could look at it.

"Who is that?" the beggar questioned. The painting bore a slight resemblance to himself, but in the painting before him, he saw a person of dignity with squared shoulders and bright, uplifted eyes, almost handsome.

He asked the artist, "Is that me? I don't look like that."

The artist replied, "But that is the person I see in you."

We must understand that God doesn't see us as everyone else sees us. People around us may see us as cool, successful, unattractive, popular, old, whatever.

It doesn't matter at all how others may see us. God sees our hearts, sees us as we really are. Perhaps we wish we had Him fooled, like those we've led to believe that we're less frightened, more confident, happier than we really are.

Or perhaps we're deeply grateful that God sees through all the shallow, negative judgments which so many people have placed on us. Probably, it's both.

Our Lord – to our joy and to our sorrow – looks into our hearts and sees us as we really are.

We are now in Lent, a solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar that began on Ash Wednesday and ends about six weeks later, before Easter Sunday. That's a call for introspection – to confess that we have not loved our Lord with our whole hearts, nor loved our neighbors as ourselves.

This Lent, let's examine ourselves, asking God to search our hearts. We benefit from naming our sins, our needs, our losses and failings.

In the process, we can admit to God that only by His grace and guidance can we find healing and help.

And through the resultant spiritual refreshment and restoration, we are much more able to fulfill the mission to which He has called us – loving God and loving others.

*But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7 ESV).*