

Sacred Stories

Look, and See Their Past Lives



spirituality

Suggested Sacred Text

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

John 3:2

I attended a youth mass at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church before my 7:00 p.m. shift in SICU. The priest's challenge to the youth was to visit nursing homes in the area and get to know the residents. He encouraged the young people to look into the faces of the residents and beyond to see their unique inner selves and learn of the lives they had lived.

This was on my mind as I received a report from the day shift nurse on the one patient I was to care for that Sunday evening. "Confused and combative... history of alcoholism... abnormal

labs... an MICU overflow who was admitted from ER... You will have a busy night."

As I assessed the patient, I wondered about his past, about loved ones that might visit, and about what might have happened in his life to bring him to this point. He was lethargic and dis-oriented, but was not combative at the time.

At 8:00 p.m. visiting time, a well-dressed young man appeared in my patient's room. It was his son. Concern and love for the man in the hospital bed was evident on the son's face. I introduced myself, answered his questions and left so he could be alone with his father.

When it was near the end of visiting time, I went back into my patient's room. The young man was standing by his father's side holding his hand, tears on his eyelids. Without looking up, he said, "My father wasn't always like this. He had a full life with my mother, my sister, and me, but then

we lost my mother and Dad couldn't cope. It has been hard. My sister won't even come to see him anymore."

I put my hand on his shoulder and gave what comfort I could. "I'll take care of him for you tonight, for you and your sister." The son said good-bye to his father and left.

For the rest of my shift the priest's words echoed in my mind. "Look into their faces, see their past lives, the love they share, the pain they have felt." It is all there for us to feel and understand. No matter what we see on the outside, they are still children of God and special people.

These words gave me strength and patience to deal with what I had to that night. I also know that nursing at Memorial Hospital is based on this kind of reverence for the total person. It is important to take time to know and care for the inner person that may be hidden deep inside a patient.

Catherine Heimbecher
Memorial Health Care System
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Questions for Reflection

What does it mean to look beyond faces and see the unique past lives of people?

How can you practice seeing the inner person within the people you encounter?