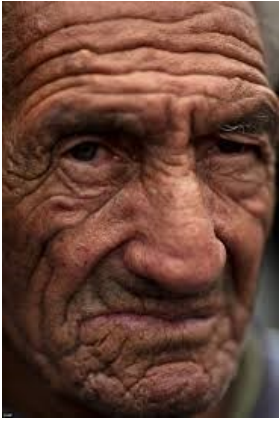


## Faces of Advent

Dear People of Prince Edward Island,

When addressing the US Congress in September Pope Francis referred to the plight of immigrants by urging Congressional leaders to think not of the costs and the programs but to think first of their *faces*. Looking at the human face of social issues profoundly affects our judgment. The face of the other person powerfully probes the depth of our own human experience. Is this not the reason that the human face builds so naturally on human



art and history? Who has not heard of *Helen*, the face that launched a thousand ships? Is not Da Vinci's greatest masterpiece a classic, precisely because *Mona Lisa's* face is so mysterious? Then there are the many portraits of Canadian artist Yosuf Karsh! As a photo subject, Sir Winston Churchill seemed too congenial for Karsh. So, to portray the warrior spirit on the face of Sir Winston, Karsh boldly reached forward and plucked the cigar Sir Winston had been holding in his hand. Immediately Karsh snapped the photo and captured the character of authentic, angry resolve on the face of this World War II leader. For artists and for all those who are contemplative, there is mystery and beauty in every face. Decisions and judgments can be made on the basis of emotions and ideas, but a face to face encounter offers an open-ended, rather risky basis for an interpersonal decision.

According to the Psalmist, longing to see the face of God is the deepest desire in the human heart and the energy that drives the human spirit. **“Come”, my heart says, ‘seek his face!’ Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me.”** Ps.27:8-9. This sentiment is the very breath of the Season Advent.

Advent is a time of waiting and of yearning to see the face of God. The best way to do this is to find in the faces of others reflections of God's light in our world. Young, old, male, female, western or eastern, wrinkled or smooth, faces are icons of God's grace in our lives. Recognizing human dignity in the faces of others, especially those on the periphery of society, gives us a glimpse of the justice, the joy and the mercy of the face of divinity.



About two thousand years ago, the entry of divinity into human history was occasioned by the birth of Jesus. In his very human face we recognize the face of divinity.



So here is a suggestion for Advent. Look for the face of joy and the face of mercy. Don't be surprised if you discover them in the faces of those who are suffering. Search particularly among those less fortunate, on the street, in your neighborhood, even on television news programs where you can see the faces of refugees narrowly escaping death and destruction. Look, contemplate and recognize the coming of divinity through those faces. This is just one way to prepare the celebration of the birth of Divinity in human history.

It was Saint John Paul II who used very human terms to describe the meaning of holiness. He said we should think of holiness as reflecting the face of Jesus. Will our own faces reflect the joy and mercy of the infant Jesus in preparation for the celebration of Christmas? We might, if we are seeing and recognizing dignity and mystery in the faces of others.

My sincerest wishes for a joyful, merciful Advent and a restful, loving and merry Christmas.

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