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Smiles

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Smiles

Smiles are perhaps our most powerful means of communication. Recently, I looked at a picture of the new General Superior of the Jesuits, just after he had been chosen to bear the responsibility of governance for an organization of some 20,000 men around the world. The smile is radiant and unaffected, not the strained smile of a politician or the practiced smile of someone in entertainment. Whenever we smile spontaneously, we are very likely manifesting visibly the joy that we experience at the hidden presence of God within us.

Most of the photos we keep are of people smiling. Some of our deepest desires, for us and for others, are to experience the conditions that most readily draw forth smiles from us. When we smile, our eyes act as the windows of our souls. We can indicate respect, care, consideration, acceptance, and understanding in our smiles, just as we can manifest the opposite through frowns. The truth of our love for others, in all its various forms and degrees, becomes visible in our smiles.

We give one another great gifts with sincere smiles of appreciation. Of course we can "force" a smile, or smile outwardly while feeling anything but loving. But spontaneous smiles come from our hearts, where we are most intimately connected with the Spirit of God. We do not have to think or intend to convey anything of God to others when we smile, but God is love, and every least manifestation of love is of God.

Does God smile? Since the consequences of God within us are often manifested in smiles, even inward smiles that do not always become visible on our faces, we can imagine that the invisible God is a God of smiles. What moves the muscles of our faces when we are relieved, or healed, or become aware that "all is well?" The smile of God is on our faces, for the sake of others, and for us too.

How do we picture the face of Jesus, who has accomplished all he intended by his life, death, and resurrection? Frowning is out of the question! When we greet those who are sick, or those who are in serious difficulties, we do not smile at their pain, any more than Jesus smiles at our suffering. All of us, including Jesus, declare with our smiles, that we care, and are ready to respond to whatever another person experiences.

When we are alone, we still might have many occasions to smile. Imagine Jesus Christ coming up, and calling us by name. As we look up, we are met with a radiant and gracious eye-to-eye smile. If we let ourselves imagine this, our own facial muscles will probably relax, and we might even smile in return. Again, we can imagine encountering someone we know, and while thinking of that person, allow a smile to develop on our faces. If a smile develops, even if it remains invisible, love is very likely at work in our hearts. Finally, imagine a smile on our faces as we turn towards God in prayer. If we smile at God, our prayer must be some kind of statement of love, even if we also communicate a request or express another concern.

God smiles at us all the time. If we want to, we can smile back. And in the smiling, we can be sure that God's love is active within us.