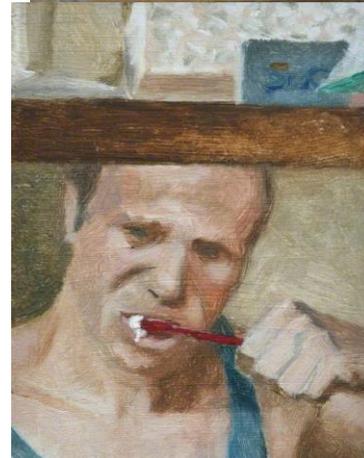
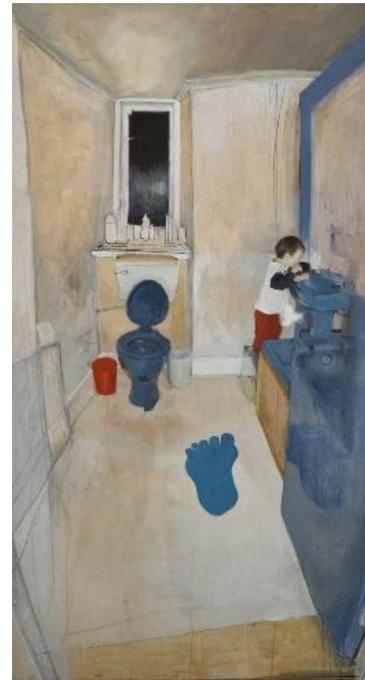
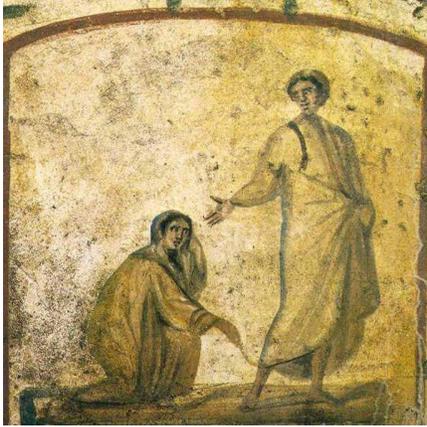


Bathroom



Scripture:

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1: 27)

Opening Prayer

We give thanks for the gift that is home,

We bless the one who gave us life that we might experience love

We bless the ones with whom we live and share that love.

We bless this day and watch for the blessings it holds in wait.

We bless those we know and love now in their own homes.

May we always be truly grateful and ever-loving good Lord. Amen.

Reflection

My Mother's name is Veronica, so I have a personal interest in that name. And as Catholic Christians we recognize her as the woman who rushed out of the crowd to wipe Jesus's bloodied and sweaty face as he made his way to Calvary. According to legend the imprint of Christ's face was left on the cloth and retained as a relic.

The name itself is a Latin version of the name and is formed of two words: the Latin *vera* (true) and the Greek *eikona* (image). Strange that a woman called true icon should be the one that ends up possessing a precious image of the Christ. But that's how legends work. They invite us to consider that there are deeper meanings to some of the seemingly innocuous the events of human history. Legends employ characters like actors in a play, whose names sometimes signal the part they play as the story unfolds. Christopher is another example. His name means bearer of Christ. His story subverts the Greek myth of Atlas who bore the whole world on his shoulders. As Christopher carries his small charge across the river the weight becomes almost; but not quite unbearable. For this child bears the weight of all the world's sins and we are asked to play our part as Christopher did. Although we carry Christ within us rather than on our shoulders.

But returning to Veronica, Christian legend also identifies her as the woman suffering from a hemorrhage who approached Jesus in a crowd and reached out to touch his cloak. Jesus's response was to commend her faith saying: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed." (Mark 5: 34)

What's all this got to do with bathrooms? A very good question indeed. So, let's begin with Veronica's name. *True Icon*, echoes the words used in the creation account. For God willed to create humanity as an image of the divine. There are no qualifications here, no criteria for deciding if one human being rather than another is more divine. So, when we look ourselves in the mirror God's true image reflects back at us. We are all Veronica's.

Our value is not measured by the way others see us. Not even by the way we see ourselves. But truth be told, we worry about these things. Or perhaps we throw in the towel (excuse the pun) and neglect our welfare, taking no interest at all in how we present ourselves or keep our body clean and healthy.

Perhaps it would help if we were to prioritize how we reflect God's image rather than some idealized, photoshopped image glaring out of a magazine. Nor is salvation to be discovered in the gym. None of which is to suggest that we cannot find a particular delight in taking exercise or how we dress, the tone of our skin and the brightness of our smile. I will never forget the joy a friend of mine expressed when after years of mediocre shoes for her size eight feet she finally chanced upon some beautiful pink shoes.

Hymn Verses

Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
In you, and you in me.

(John Bell and Graham Maule ©Wild Goose Worship)

Blessing Prayer

We bless the face we encounter each time we gaze into the mirror
Watching it change with the seasons of life
Rediscovering again and again our inner beauty and strength.
We bless the joy that is to be found in a smile, the wink of an eye.
And as we wash away all that clings to our bodies after an exerting day.
We bless the water that cleanses and restores us.
We bless too those who recognize our personal charm,
Those who pay us compliments and notice our new look.
Blessings to those who pass by too easily unnoticed;
We pray for the resurrection of the bodies that hide away
through shame or anxiety.
That they will bask in the warmth of our creator's first compliment,
You are beautiful. So be it for us all. Amen.

Notes on Artworks

- If Veronica was the woman who approached Jesus in the midst of a crowd; (Figure 1 *Haemorrhissa*, **Woman with a Hemorrhage**. Early 4th century fresco in the Catacomb of Saints Marcellinus and Peter, Rome) then she surely had some bottle. Her affliction marked her out as unclean. No self-respecting woman suffering such a condition would leave the relative safety of her home. Hitherto she had complied perhaps; being messed about with quack remedies from charlatans. So, taking matters into her own hands, she sought out the one person who could see her true nature and potential. When Jesus commended her for her 'faith,' he was, I suggest, affirming her self-belief as much as her trust in God.
- As with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we enter this world blissfully unaware of the shame that came to be associated with the human body. Being bathed in the sink was not at all uncommon until recent times (figure 2 **Mother Bathing Child**, Jack Smith, 1953). Infancy is a time of life when running on the beach liberated from clothing and especially nappies is sheer joy for many a child.

- Eventually we establish a degree of autonomy in the bathroom (figure 3, **Blue Bathroom**, Nicole Bennet). This presents an opportunity to become acquainted with the idea of respecting ourselves. Taking pride in our appearance without succumbing to slavery to the image industry. All too sadly, this same industry has already intruded deeply into the lives of the young.
- One saying that hangs over from Victorian times is “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”, at least to the extent that regular bathing and showering is *de rigeur* for the modern, although it is not God's approval many seek today. (Figure 4 **Man Taking a Shower**, David Hockney)
- Paying attention to ourselves is not always negative, indeed it can be a very healing exercise. For self-respect is the very opposite of vanity, which Frederick Nietzsche described as “the fear of being original”. (Figure 5. **The Ear-Ring**, Ambrose McEvoy, 1911)
- Most days however, visits to the bathroom can be a rather hurried affair, a splash of water to wipe the sleep from our eyes, a brush through the hair, teeth attended to with a few brisk strokes, a blast of deodorant and we're ready for the day (Figure 6. **Self Portrait: Brushing My Teeth**, William Ashley Hold)
- Such speed cannot be maintained indefinitely however, and there comes a time when the ritual of ablutions becomes more time consuming for the simple fact that our body slows down. (Figure 7. **Aging Man Washing**, Louis Le Brocquy, 1954). But preserving our self-worth and dignity into old age is a sign of grace. Our elegance and stature can endure when we live under the gaze of truth. We need not take our cue from others, we know our bodies better than anyone, and they remain beautiful in the eyes of the creator in whose image we are made.

Crafty Kids

Mirrors can be fun. We get to pull funny faces to ourselves. We can take a close look at what is unique about us and what is similar to other members of the family. Have you worked out yet what colour your eyes are? Who else in the family has the same colour of eyes? This way we can begin to see some of the ways we look at bit like Mum and a bit like Dad, only the best bits of course. But we are also the children of God, we share his love, his kindness and his freedom from being influenced by false ideas and insults.

Many hurtful and unkind things can be said in school playgrounds and on social media. Sometimes we let these things have too much power over how we look at ourselves. At times like this it is extra important to remember what we learn from the Bible. The very first book of the Bible tells a story intended to underline some important things. First, whatever

we look like, we are made in God's image. We are absolutely unique, a one off, and that's part of what God loves about us. Nothing anyone says can take that away from us.

So, how about sending this message to everyone who uses the bathroom. We can make a small sign, not much bigger than a fridge magnet. We can put a smiley face on it or a message like: "You are perfect just as you are!" or "Say hello to God's Image!"