On Being a Catholic Physician **The road to Damascus**

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It's night shift in the Emergency Department. The usual midnight rush has settled down, and the admitted patients are all sorted. I relished my first chance to sit down and get caught up on charting. Just then I spied an old guy shuffling into the waiting room. Annoyed, I asked the nurse who he was. "He's just some street bum looking for a bed for the night."

I got rattled. Not on my watch was this going to happen! I sped out to the waiting room to head him off before he could register. "Sorry buddy—we're all full—there's no bed here for you."

Normally when you encounter a homeless person, they look down and don't make eye contact. This man, however, transfixed me with his eyes. He did not speak, but in my mind I heard, loud and clear, the words from Matthew's gospel: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me." *I was looking at the face of Jesus.* I stood there paralyzed while he slowly turned away and left the hospital. After a few moments I shook off my inertia and went running after him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

This encounter transformed me. From that moment, I've tried to see the face of Jesus in my patients, especially the most

difficult ones. Mother Teresa understood this. When asked how she could touch the poorest of the poor, covered with filth and sores and flies, she replied:

God is in every human being. When I wash the leper's wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord himself. Is it not a beautiful experience? (<http://www.iskandar.com/waleed911/motherteresa.html>)

I don't always succeed at this, but at least my disposition is to care and not to confront or resent the patients. When I strive to see the face of Jesus in my patients, my vocation in medicine becomes rich and fulfilling, and I am able to repay that homeless vagrant for showing me the way.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Dr. Bright is a family physician in Chilliwack, BC, Canada. He is a former CMA board member, and he is a past president of the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians' Societies. He is a clinical associate professor in the Department of Family Practice at the University of British Columbia. His email address is brightness@shaw.ca.