

## Child of God

I wasn't in the best of moods a few months ago when I arrived at the local hospital and registered for a procedure that, while not truly serious, was nonetheless worrisome. When anything begins to go wrong with my health, I get a little testy, as if I arrived here on earth with a guarantee of perfect health, and now the promise had been broken. An unrealistic expectation, certainly, but it's disappointing to find I won't live forever.

In the small, cramped waiting room, sniffling toddlers raced around the chairs, crying and screaming in languages I had never heard. Arthritic grandmothers hushed them up from time to time, using sounds that have universal meaning. Normally, this would have interested the budding anthropologist in me, but not that day. I just wondered when they would calm down and if my taxes were paying for their medical care. As each childhood argument evaporated, our dull-eyed stares returned to the blaring cable news channel. More stories about nothing and nobodies. My mood wasn't getting any better.

A middle aged woman reminiscent of a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher from long ago came out of her admitting office to rescue me. Having my name shouted across a public waiting room has always made me uncomfortable, and I can't say why. After all, I have a right to be there. Mrs. Prim led me into her tiny cubicle, wiggled into the chair opposite the computer screen, and began to grill me with some of the most inane questions ever invented by the folks who dream up admission questionnaires. I've suffered through all of these queries before, and I still don't know why anyone needs to know my mother's maiden name.

"It's so long ago that I've forgotten," I sometimes offer as a response. "Mary Contrary" is another answer I'll often give. This time, I said, "Mom would never tell me. She was in the Witness Protection Program.

The woman didn't bat an eye, but continued down her list.

"Your religion, sir?" she asked.

That question always aggravates me. Why do I have to subscribe to a named religion to appreciate God or to walk a spiritual journey? As a kid, I stood with my fellow students each morning and recited a list of our prescribed beliefs, intoning the Nicene Creed while Sister Mary Monotony graded papers at her desk. It didn't make much sense then and it still doesn't.

So I answered the woman by saying, "I'm a child of god."

She glanced up from her computer, and I knew what she was thinking: "Child Of God," the name of a religion? Or "child of god," just another worker in the vineyard. To clarify, she asked, "Do you meet every Sunday?"

"In person?" I asked, "No, I've never met the guy." She looked me over and said, "Probably best for you."

I laughed, and my mean spirit relented.

"I'm just in a bad mood," I said, "and the Parade of Nations out there in the Waiting Room annoyed me."

"Yes," she said. "They're the real children of God."

"How do you mean,?" I asked.

"A child of God is someone to serve, never yourself."

She was right, of course. The Spirit among us is all about how we treat people, not what we think of ourselves.

"Then I suppose I'm not a Child of God," I said.

"To me you are," she said, "because I'm trying to treat you like one."

"Oh," I said.

"Now," she continued briskly in a voice that still held humor, "if we're all straightened out on that, what the heck is your mother's maiden name?"

Just two pilgrims, I suppose, struggling through life's little frustrations. It's often during such struggles that I learn something. I might indeed be a Child of God. But very definitely, you are.

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