

THE ODOMETER KNOWS

In the classic 1980's movie Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Ferris convinces his friend, Cameron Frye, to take out his father's massively expensive Ferrari on a little journey to NYC. The small number of miles, he believes, will be so insignificant that Cameron's father, who is dedicated to the car and practically accounts for every piece of dust on it, will not notice.

Against Cameron's better judgment, Ferris, Ferris' girlfriend, and Cameron take the luxury car and park it in a downtown structure while they wander around the city. What they did not count on is that the two parking attendants decide that they will do some joy riding of their own, in the Ferrari, and put many, many miles on the car.

The movie's ending has the trio bringing the car into a cabin, elevating the rear wheels, and running the car in reverse for hours in an attempt to turn back the odometer -- which, by the way, does not work. The car falls accidentally from the structure and rips through the glass window to its utter demise in the back yard.

Moral of the story: in the end, hiding your tracks, flying under the radar is very hard to do -- and, unless you're Ferris Bueller, not Cameron, it will eventually catch up with you.

This truth weaves its way throughout life. From cameras that catch petty thieves, to IRS agents who conduct an audit, to cameras on a football field that show a player's illegal hits and other indiscretions, to keystrokes on a computer's hard drive -- there is little one can get away with in the public sector. In the end, the odometer catches up with us all.

Or does it? While it may be true in the public sector, how much of our lives are lived out in places that are known only to us? The cubicle in our office, the computer in our basement, the privacy of our car, the solitude of our home? Let's be honest. Law enforcement is not generally at our back door or in the deep recesses of our thinking. In general, we have the quiet freedom to do what we want without the cameras following us, the keystrokes being monitored, the phone tapped. The better number of us live every day in numerous hours, maybe many hours in simple privacy, being accountable largely to ourselves for our morality, our integrity, our honesty. Am I right?

And yet, our Scriptural texts for today remind us that there IS one who knows all things -- who is well aware of our actions and thoughts throughout the day, whether in public or in private -- whether admirable or condemnable. Even in His humanity, Jesus demonstrates to Nathaniel, in our Gospel Lesson, that before meeting him, he saw him under the fig tree, he knew of his character. Later on in chapter 2 of this same book we read this: “Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs Jesus was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.”

Our Psalm today says it too, concerning the Lord: “You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.” You get that? Even before our words come out of our mouths, He knows what we’re going to say.

In our Epistle Lesson, Paul reminds the Corinthians that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and that, because He lives within us, when we act we are not acting alone. We are using His body -- His precious vessel, as a servant, hopefully, of the Gospel.

In short, the odometer always knows. That is, there is no place to hide from God. Adam and Eve couldn’t do it. Cain couldn’t do it. Jonah couldn’t do it. And neither can we. We are His people, the sheep of His flock. And He knows each one of us not only by name, but also our hearts, our thoughts, our fears, failures, frustrations.

What do you think? Is that a blessing, or a curse?

I don’t know about you, but on first thought that fact, puts goosebumps on my back. Cause I know that the Phil Hillenbrand that lives within this body and who uses this body every day isn’t always the Phil Hillenbrand that I would like everyone to see. You get to see the Phil Hillenbrand who preaches the Gospel, the Phil Hillenbrand who visits the sick, the Phil Hillenbrand who teaches Bible Study. This is the Phil Hillenbrand that I choose to let you see. He’s the one who can be kind and generous and loving and self-controlled. I wish I were him 24/7. I wish I could boast that his face is the 100% authentic one.

But if I pull out the odometer of my life and look at the numbers, I get to see the Phil Hillenbrand who also can be selfish, inconsiderate, greedy, prideful, angry, and who breaks any number of the commandments on a regular basis. I know this man -- all too well. And some of you have seen him too, in the not so better day of his journey. And, if I take today's texts seriously, God knows him too. Every last inch. From the works of my hands to the feelings of my heart to the words I will speak tomorrow. He is well aware of it all.

And, like Cameron's car, there are plenty of things that I'd like to reverse out of my life - plenty of areas that I'd like erased, eliminated, removed from the miles on my odometer. I bet its true of you too. Right? Failures and faults -- inappropriate words, wrongful actions -- times I've hurt the one's I love or times I've given sway to the Tempters lures. I know that I deserve not God's blessings, but His condemnation -- lot His love, but His scorn.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, the words of our lessons were not at all intended to scare us, to shame us, to make us fear our God. Because, you see, each one is intended to be coupled with a new perspective.

As some of you know, I recently had eye surgery. It removed the damaged lenses of my eyes and replaced them with crisp, clean, reshaped ones that enable me to see the world clearer than I've been seeing it for the last fifteen years. These new lenses have given me brighter colors, crisper images, and enabled me to enjoy sights that I haven't been seeing for some time.

Let me show you the lens of God which enables Him also to have a new perspective on us. Here it is: the cross of Jesus Christ. This is the lens, my friend, through which our God chooses to view us.

Yes, He knows everything about us -- every nook and cranny of our being. And yes, there are many disappointments, embarrassments, shameful and scandalous activity that could be found in the secret dark corners which we keep hidden from all. But God, through the blood-bought gift of forgiveness through the cross of Jesus Christ, looks at us through this lens. And when He does, all of that is washed away -- the odometer DOES roll back, and instead of hearing Jesus' voice of disappointment at all of our faults and failures, He instead speaks to us as He does to Nathaniel in our text: "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

That is, He says to us: “Phil, (other names) I am happy to call you my own. And I am happy to see that my Spirit is at work in you. Rejoice, my friend, and be glad also, for your name is written in my Book of Life, and I will continue to strengthen you as my servant through Word and Sacrament.”

And after we hear those words, then, we too are given a new perspective. Because when our sins are forgiven and God sees us through the lens of the cross, then His knowledge of every action, thought, and feeling - rather than being a source of fear and trembling - instead becomes a word of comfort. For He knows us, and He loves us. And He is committed, in Christ, to be there by our side in the middle of all our days.

As He says in the Psalm:

7Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

And instead of being there to point His rightful finger of judgment, He becomes our sustainer, our guardian, our guide. And we rejoice with St. Paul to say:

35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are a lot of miles ahead, brothers and sisters. Some we will want to remember, others maybe we will want to forget. But one thing stands secure: they are miles that we drive with Jesus, and with Him by our side we can rejoice that we are loved, we are safe, and we are saved. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.