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Dear Friends:

LAND OF THE FAUX

FAUX: fake, not real, resembling something that is genuine and of better quality.

Last week I pulled through one of those trendy coffee places to get a treat for the drive ahead but I made a terrible mistake. I was in a hurry and my order was simple but wrong. "I'll take a medium coffee, cream and Splenda (and deciding to splurge a bit) and some cinnamon thrown in."

In a flash, the nasally condescending little voice, in corrective mode, pierced back through the cheesy speakers, "No, (right here I was waiting for the word "ignoramus" to be thrown in), do you mean a Grande, Cinnamon Dolce Latte with whipped cream?"

"Yeah, that will be fine." I now realized I was so unworthy to even be in this line.

A bit ticked off, my first impulse was to remind my pompous friend that I was the one who was about to pay him five bucks for his dollar coffee. After all, I had always heard that the customer is always right.

When I finally got to the window, my corrector was waiting and I found myself staring at a walking identity crisis. Should I do the tattoo or the Clearasil? The speech had been so precise and to think, the tongue stud didn't get in the way.

Acting like I was bothering him, my server barely gave me a glance as he snatched my money. You'll be glad to know that I stayed Christian the entire time but I did wait for every penny of my change.

As I pulled away I realized that my young friend was just playing a role like most of the other kids in there. For a few hours each day, he was somebody of status and importance. When his time was up he would likely jump into the brown Plymouth Duster I had seen in the parking lot and turn back into a college sophomore.

Status role play is a big thing these days and as a confirmed people watcher, it is a daily visual buffet. Just check out the mall, the health club, the school, the elevator in your building, the business meeting, the coffee shop, and the even grocery... the places are full of role players. Everybody trying to be somebody.

While waiting, I can always tell whether I am at the High End Specialty Food Store or just the regular grocery by who walks out. If the lady has one of those "70 mile an hour, head out of the window" pulled faces or puffy pillow lips, I'm not at the Piggly Wiggly.

The guys are just as bad as their toys and bravado validates them to their peers and to themselves.

Just last week, I went into a fashionable men's store and was tackled by a persnickety gent who was going to graciously help me correct my fashion violations. After my third "I'm just looking" speech, he finally got the message and walked off in a tiff. I didn't need a \$150 tie anyway.

In the last few months, I've had some first hand experiences in the "Land of the Faux" and it seems that perfunctory arrogance permeates many circles.

You'd think there would be some safe place from the faux faction, free from the peering over the glasses inspection drill, perhaps a church would be a good place to start. Naw, guess not.

I was at one gathering as one individual paraded through. My born again brother gave me a quick facial recognition, spoke to the other two folks in the room and walked on by me. You, see, I didn't belong to his particular Holy Huddle and wasn't worthy of his time. In a funny observation, the back of his t-shirt had a "they will know we are Christians by our love" declaration.

Linda had some business to take care of at a supposed Christian business. She was actually doing something to help them. Later, in the end of the day catch up time, I asked, "How did it go?" While waiting for a hopefully different report she said, "They could not have been any more indifferent and cold if they had worked at it". Sadly, it didn't have to be that way but she didn't fit in their Covenant Cloister.

In a similar situation, I had a recent conversation/question moment with one person that didn't even bother to look up from his desk to courteously give me a brief answer. My boys would have been corrected for such behavior. Guess in real life he's an affable chap who will witness to the Pizza guy.

Such examples are not new or surprising, even to our kids. They, like some of you, have been on the receiving end of some of the meanest muck simply because they did not run in the sanctioned anointed circles. Thus witnessing those who, like little Napoleonic gate keepers, are immersed in their miniature myopic worlds of Christian Status Role Play and who assume they are so special that their feet don't smell.

In the quest for the authentic, your heart has to see the surrounding charades and wonder, where is the real?

Today especially, we need the real that we can look to and not someone who copies and role plays the words, delivery and mannerisms of others to grab a Pastor, First Mama or Grand Apostle title in order to collect a few bucks and a coat carrying, brief case clutching intern serf who bows and scrapes to make sure the awesome one is comfortable. In a word, vapid.

You haven't lived until you been able to observe a gaggle of status grabbing, role playing preachers. You begin wondering if some of them are actually going to go in the corner and mark their territory like a Golden Retriever. Role Play, woof, woof.

In a conversation with a pastor friend, he asked about a striving fellow we both knew, words like pompous and manipulative came to mind but I simply used an old cowboy expression, "All Hat, No Cows". My seasoned ministry friend said, "More like, a wannabee without substance". Role play gone bad.

In the 13th century, St Francis penned the words to a beautiful prayer, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace" where he spoke of the desire to bring love, faith, light and joy to a world caught up in just the opposite. Now that is something real to copy.

Oh God, help us not to fall into the role play trap. Let us, as your instruments, avoid the superficial and continue to walk in authenticity and blessing. Let us be characterized as real and genuine and let faux only be used to describe our fur coats, not our faith.

Michael

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