



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



"Faking It"

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For the past thirty years or so, my sister and I have had a contest going to see who could be the most annoying. It will come as no surprise to my monastic brethren that I definitively won that contest several years ago. My sister, who was between homes, had not received the newspaper in several weeks, and although she has virtually no interest in current events, she is absolutely addicted to the comics. So I sent her a big box packed with all the comics of the previous weeks. But I had cut them all out individually, and I had cut off the last panel of every single cartoon. Two weeks later, I sent her a second box with all the last panels in it. Mixed up. To my knowledge, she is still in the process of taping them all back together. And just between you and me--I still have some of those panels in my desk drawer.

In all fairness to me, however, it should be noted that she started it. In fact, I remember asking my father once when I was very young whether it was really necessary to love one's sister. My father, of course, insisted that it was. And I recall explaining to him at length that this would be very very difficult given the current circumstances, and that perhaps we should consider giving her up for adoption, because, quite frankly, the two of us were just going to spend the rest of our lives making each other miserable--that it simply was beyond my power to be nice to her. My father said to me, "Jason, you may find this hard to believe, but some day, you will discover that you do love your sister. And when that day comes, you will actually want to be nice to her. In the meantime, however, FAKE IT."

At the time, this sounded like awfully cold advice, but if we are to put into action what Christ demands of us in today's gospel--if we really are to love God with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul, and our neighbor as ourself--then there are going to be times when we don't feel very predisposed to that emotion. When we don't feel as though we like our neighbor--or even God--particularly much. Because let's face it, some people are very very difficult to love. And even God can seem awfully distant at times. But if you think about it, those times when we must force ourselves to "fake" this love for our neighbor--those times when we don't have warm feelings for him, but do good to him anyway well, in a strange sort of way, those are the most sincere instances of love. Because those are the times when our motives are most pure. That's when we can give love without hope of recompense.

And if the wise ones are right, then the curious result of all this feigned affection is that an unfeigned affection begins to grow out of it. "The worldly man treats



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certain people kindly because he "likes" them:" wrote C.S.Lewis, "the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on--including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning." And so, thirty years down the road, and many annoying victories later, it turns out that I really do love my sister.

You see, we can expend a great deal of time and spiritual energy wondering whether or not we truly "love" God. Questioning whether or not our love for our neighbor is sincere. Or trying to manufacture affectionate feelings for the people who distress us. But frankly, I think that's a waste of time. Because loving God with our whole heart, mind, and soul PLUS loving all our neighbors too--well, that's pretty near impossible, at least by our own efforts.

So until we arrive at that point where loving everyone comes naturally, perhaps it's best just to fake it--that is, to act as though we love our neighbors whether or not we really feel it, and hope in the meantime that some day we will be able to see them with the eyes of faith.

Then at last we will be able to sing with the psalmist: "I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer."