

Veronica.

THE CHURCH of Our Father of Detroit, always on the left side of liberal causes, towered like a Michigan lighthouse, beacon to a safe harbor. A destitute mother and her three children, fear in their eyes, suitcases and teddy bears in tow, sought refuge at the rectory. “Mi esposo tuvo que regresar a Mexico,” she said. “No tenemos documentos de identidad.”

There was no hesitation. The rectory’s dormitory could accommodate the family and the church could provide sanctuary until they obtained legal status and housing. The mother - Veronica - wept tears of joy and gratitude: “es un milagro.” “I wouldn’t go that far,” said the rector.

Members of the Church of Our Father of Detroit adopted the family and provided a wealth of resources, not only food and shelter, but counseling and health care. The nearby Free Legal Aid Clinic put Veronica in touch with immigration attorneys.

The days ticked by. As close as her children kept to their teddy bears, Veronica kept to her rosary and a faded, thin, rose-colored cloth the size of a handkerchief. She carefully, precisely folded the cloth around the rosary, tucked them into a small pouch, and went nowhere without them. The cloth, she said, was sacred. It was impressed with the image of Jesus. He looked weary and gray, older than he was usually portrayed, and unhandsome. He had thick eyebrows and a big nose.

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She reverently exhibited the cloth to anyone and everyone. “¿Ves Su rostro?” she asked, holding the cloth up to the light the way you would a hundred-dollar bill. The response was always the same. “No.” “Él te hablara,” she replied, smiling. Some of the church-goers avoided her as if they were afraid.

The rector had to admit that he did not see the face of Jesus, either. As for whether Jesus spoke to him, well . . . . He did his gentle, tolerant best with Veronica, trying hard not to be dismissive or condescending. Veronica could not explain the inexplicable, but her faith was as strong as it was humble. She read from her book of devotions: knowing our own unworthiness, we should not be surprised if an encounter with the Lord is uncomfortable or distressing. Is there anyone in the Bible seeing an angel who was not afraid, stunned or stricken? Did not the apostle Paul himself fall to the ground?

On a too-warm late June day, Veronica sat on a bench in front of the church to pray her rosary. A work crew was putting the finishing touches on a newly-poured section of the sidewalk. A lanky teen-ager stepped around the fresh concrete. Veronica respectfully declined her head and lifted her rosary to him. He paused, contorted a heavy eyebrow, and went into the church. She spread her rose cloth on her lap and prayed the Mysteries of Identity that Jesus of the cloth had spoken to her:

1. God is all, forever.
2. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God.
3. The Holy Spirit animates us as it animates the Church.

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4. The source, the life and the destiny of our identity is communion with God.
5. We are children of God and therefore heirs.

She finished the Hail, Holy Queen - *that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ* - knowing surely who she was, she crossed herself. At the same time, the lanky teenager burst out of the Church of Our Father of Detroit and bounded down the steps.

On his heels was the rector:

**"STOP!"**

Veronica's English was limited, but **STOP!** needed no translation. The boy was no good Samaritan - and her reflexes were inspired. She stuck out her foot; he tripped over her lower leg and face-planted in the new sidewalk, impressing his image into the cement. Veronica jumped up, clutching her rosary. Her hallowed cloth popped up from her lap, carried in the breeze, and settled next to the teenager, stunned and gray, the suffering face of Jesus joining him in the slop.

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