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# Advent Devotional "The Image of the Invisible"

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Advent Devotional  
December 6, 2006  
The Image of the Invisible  
Colossians 1:15-16

The father I know is sometimes present, sometimes not, appearing and disappearing like a magician's assistant. Physically he remains, slowed and changed by time, as are we all. Aurally the intonations and cadences that have been part of all my sentient life still resound, though again suffering time's inexorable alterations. Like all humans, what has defined him throughout my life, what has made him the father I have known, is invisible. Usually we call it personality, but at its heart lies memory. And his memory is now more unreliable than his chronological age dictates. Intellectually I've always known that what makes us who we are is invisible, some genetic encoding plus an accumulation of experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. I've also known that who we are resides in multiple memories, those of family and friends and acquaintances in addition to our own. Now I know much more viscerally, as I see memory and personality powerless before an invisible disease.

Other things have also recently reminded me of the power of the invisible. Recognizing that power, in the Christian tradition we have long prayed some variation of the old Scottish prayer, "From ghoulies and ghostlies/ And long leggitie beasties/ And things that go bump in the night,/ Good Lord, deliver us!" The other day I remembered the usefulness of Harry Potter's Invisibility Cloak as I thought of my mother's customary wish to be "a fly on the wall" at family gatherings where her

physical presence is impossible. I thought of the cloak in relation to science which, like magic and religion, deals with the invisible and often with its power. And I particularly thought of science's power when Stephen and Misty showed us the sonogram of their unborn (and thus invisible) child as their way of telling us that they are pregnant again.

As All Saints and All Souls' Days approach, I've also had running around in my head snippets of a song. "Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," it begins; it ends with the wish that those who come behind us "find us faithful." I've blithely sung the song, one of my favorites, in a variety of settings and with a variety of people. Now it's taken on a particular poignancy, one captured in my father's condition and in a trash can.

When our sons were small and we were trying to teach them the importance of cleanliness, we bought each of them a trash can. Each can celebrated a currently popular movie: one had Spiderman, the other Superman. As it happened, the Superman trash can depicted the scene in which the child-hero holds up his father's truck. And also as it happened, we were strongly suggesting to our sons that they take their childhood trash cans from our house to their own when the media announced Glenn Ford's death in August.

Glenn Ford's image lives on in "Superman," a reminder of someone who was but is no more. Misty's sonogram reveals the image of an unnamed life to come. Both are images of the invisible. Both hint at what Paul promises the Colossians: the hope that abides in Christ. Jesus, Paul says, is the image of the invisible in His power, His promise, and our hope. He is creator, but

even more He is first-born. God has the power to create, the power to save, and the power to re-create. All of that we see in the manger and in Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection.

At Christmas, we often find ourselves paying attention only to the image, to the first-born, to the Child in the manger. Jesus warned all those who would hear that He was merely the prophet, calling to repentance and pointing to God. My Advent prayer is that, as the Child did, so we will recognize that the image is not the reality of the Invisible; that, as the Child did, so we too will join that "great cloud" as faithful witnesses to the Invisible.

Ray Granada