



REFLECTIONS

June 25, 2023

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:6

Disguised Prayer

Seated in a public restaurant, a newly found friend leaned forward, fixed his eyes firmly on mine, and began to speak. By the third sentence I realized he wasn't speaking to me. His words were directed to God.

The disguised prayer recalled a Norman Rockwell scene depicted on a *Saturday Evening Post* cover where the eyes of other patrons fell on an old woman and a young boy giving thanks to God for the meal set before them. My friend also gave thanks to God for our meals but in a manner that avoided attention of other patrons. I wondered why?

We live in a country that promises free speech and freedom of religion. So why conceal our belief in God, our faith in him, and our love for him? Didn't Jesus commission us to reveal our faith to the world as we travel through it? Placing our love for God on full display seems a logical place to begin.

But Jesus said, "*And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.*" (Matthew 6:5) Eugene Peterson's *The Message* interpreted the passage this way: "*And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?*" Now, that makes sense to me too.

I think Jesus' point doesn't forbid public prayer, but neither is public prayer a place for personal performance. Rather prayers, whether in public or in secret, should always point to God.

That day my friend's eyes fixed firmly on mine, but his prayer pointed to God. And I believe the old woman and young boy Norman Rockwell depicted on the cover of *Saturday Evening Post* were unaware of the patron's eyes upon them too.

And I believe God heard their prayers.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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