

32963 Faith Column, 3-15-11

By Rev. Drs. Casey and Bob Baggott
Community Church of Vero Beach

Who Are All These People?

Family Digest once told a story of what happened on a train between Dijon and Paris, France, over a century ago. A well-dressed young college student boarded the train and took his seat in his compartment. He immediately noticed he shared his compartment with an elderly man who looked like a peasant. The youth watched as the old man with rumpled clothes and uncombed hair fingered his rosary beads in silent reverence.

"I see you are praying," the young man said with obvious scorn. "I'm surprised that in this day and age someone could still believe in such superstitious nonsense. In college I have learned that if you want to be smart you must give up such things. You must instead embrace the new science."

"The new science?" the man asked. "I'm afraid I don't understand. Perhaps you could help me." The lad thought for a moment and decided he would take this opportunity to enlighten this backward old man. "If you know how to read, I could mail you some important literature," he said.

"Oh, thank you," the old man replied, as he fumbled in his coat pocket for his card. He found the card and handed it to the college student. It read: Louis Pasteur, Paris Institute for Scientific Research.

Louis Pasteur, one of history's most significant scientists, a man whose name is emblazoned across every grocery store on a thousand items, was mistaken for a simple and ignorant man. His dress and his quiet piety were thought to place him in that category.

Surely that kind of mistaken judgment about others still happens today – and with great frequency. Perhaps you've been guilty of such errors. How do you assess others' worldliness, their sophistication, their competence, their worth? Have you ever had occasion to make an assessment of someone and then discovered you underestimated the individual because you failed to make your assessment on the right indicators?

Maybe we've all made that mistake a time or two. But, we might hope, suffering the embarrassment of such faulty judgments ought to teach us to be a little more cautious, a little more generous, a little more appreciative of others. After all, how can we know what hidden talents reside in someone we meet? How can we evaluate the inner depths of another? How can we see how faith enlightens, upholds, or guides another toward greatness? How can we assess anyone's real worth? We can't.

Only one assessment is universally true. And it should lead us to receive each one we meet, regardless of how impressive or unimpressive they might first appear, with equal respect. Everyone we meet is God's precious child. And what qualities or achievements could be more significant and worthy of respect than that?