

There is no privacy anymore. You may think you can hide your thoughts and actions, but it is hard to do. In just the past few weeks these examples have made the news: A star Olympic swimmer smoked marijuana. A great baseball player has used steroids; another one struggles with AIDS. Nominees for cabinet positions evaded taxes. Executives of failed banks used bailout money for extravagant entertainments. A discredited bishop denied the Holocaust and embarrassed the pope. High school students texting pictures of themselves naked faced pornography charges. The media reveal what many try to conceal.

It's not just in the news where people lose their privacy. Each of us is on camera whenever we go to an ATM or enter many buildings. We leave fingerprints and DNA samples even when we go to secluded places. Thoughts we've exchanged by email, texting, instant messaging, and backing up files on the web – all these thoughts exist on somebody else's computer. Even when you delete a file on your computer, it isn't really deleted; there are ways to find out what you've written, which web sites you have visited, and what people have written to you. Our actions are not as private as we think they are. We've always believed that God knows everything we do; now the rest of the world is catching up.

The desire for privacy is a human trait, and because Jesus was fully God and fully human, he wanted privacy too. We see this especially in Mark's gospel, where Jesus seems preoccupied with keeping things quiet. In some miracles, like cleansing the leper in today's gospel, he asks the person he cured not to broadcast what happened. In several exorcisms, he tells the demon not to reveal who he is. He gives private instructions to the disciples about his parables and his upcoming passion. He flees to deserted places in futile attempts to escape crowds. And when he asks, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter makes the great statement, "You are the Christ," Jesus warns the disciples not to tell anyone.

Why does Jesus do this? He hasn't committed any sins; he has nothing to hide. Perhaps he wanted some privacy as any of us would; today's newsmakers have to learn to deal with the glare of lights and cameras. Jesus may have needed time to adjust to his newfound celebrity. Most likely he wanted his identity quiet because many people would misunderstand it until after the resurrection. They expected a different kind of messiah. They probably saw that Jesus worked miracles, but they did not hear about seeking forgiveness, coming to faith, and embracing self-denial. Even today, we often want a messiah who solves the mystery of death, as long as he does the suffering and we get the resurrection. But discipleship does not work that way, nor does the messiah.

Jesus sought privacy so as to reveal his complete self later. We usually seek privacy to hide our complete self now. But who we are comes to light sooner or later. It is far better for us, for the Church and for society if we live honorably, even when we act in private, so that when our actions come to light, they will not bring shame to us, but praise to God.