



Casting Shadows
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Never satisfied with experiencing life in the same way, I invited my family to visit Disney World differently in January. (Yes, I went back again. Mickey Mouse said he wishes you'd come for a visit.) I suggested alternatives to my family, like let's only eat foods that start with the letter G. Grapes and goulash? I couldn't get any takers. In the end, we chose to hunt for shadows.



We saw Peter Pan's shadow early on, just outside the nursery window. As we kept looking, I kept photographing. It was challenging to see not just the expected objects, but to look for the shadows they cast. Some were beautiful, and others curious.

Having augmented my Disney venture with this challenge, I read with interest a reflection by Franciscan priest and author Richard Rohr.¹ It is our tendency, he wrote, to see the shadow as the negative side of oneself. "The shadow is that part of the self that we don't want to see, we don't want others to see, and of which we're always afraid. Our tendency is to try to hide it or deny it, even and most especially from ourselves. Jesus, quoting the prophet Isaiah, describes it as 'listening but not understanding, seeing but not perceiving' (Matthew 13:14-15)." He draws on the language of the plank or log in one's own eye that we need to recognize before pointing out the speck in our neighbor's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5).

Rohr suggests that Jesus would not dwell on our shadow-side, as if it were some evil to be repressed. "The genius of Jesus is that he wastes no time on repressing or denying the shadow. In that, he is a classic prophet, one of those who does not merely expose the denied shadow of Israel, but instead attacks the real problem, which is the ego and arrogance of Israel and people misusing power. Once we expose the shadow for what it is, its game is over. Its effectiveness entirely depends on disguise...."

When we are preoccupied with repressing the shadow, denying it, or hiding it from public view, we miss the opportunity for personal transformation, empathy, compassion, or patience. At its worst, we deny our shadow self and become rigid or hateful about the perceived defects in other. Rohr would describe this as immature religion, decrying that this has almost become the public image of Christianity today. "[Y]et God's goal is exactly the opposite," he concludes.

I invite you to look for your personal shadows – not to fixate on them, but to expose them. Wendy had to pull Peter Pan's shadow out from the dresser and sew it back on for Peter to become whole again. We will cast a shadow when exposed to the Light of Christ. That is our opportunity to become whole as well.



¹ Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2008, 2022), 78, 79-80.