

Desperate for God

(Part 2 of 2)

Reported sightings of signs and miracles seem to be both frequent and powerful. And the hunger to hear from God knows no nationality.

Last July (2005), people in a church outside Naples, Italy, said they saw the plaster legs of a Virgin Mary statue turn the color of flesh and move “as though she were walking toward us.” Thousands of Italians flocked to the church, hoping to see it happen again.

In early January (2006), people in a Miami neighborhood spotted what they said was an image of the Virgin Mary on a basketball backboard. They called it a miracle and set up a shrine at the base of the goal. People from all over the neighborhood came and held prayer vigils.



I know I have given enough examples, but it is hard to stop. People have seen Jesus crucified on a garage door in California, when street light reflections merged with shadows of a bush and a real-estate sign (1981); on the chimney of a suburban bowling alley in Chicago (1987); in a reflection on a linoleum table top in Harris County, Texas (1989); and in strands of spaghetti hanging from a fork on a Pizza Hut billboard in Atlanta (1991). An Ontario man claims the fish stick he burned in 2003 bears Jesus' image.



Some people call these sightings pareidolia, the type of illusion – when vague stimulus is perceived as something distinct – which may also explain sightings of Elvis, Bigfoot and UFOs. But many people clearly take them as messages from God, and it is touching to see how eager they are to feel God is talking to them. Like sparks in dry timber, each sighting seems to ignite hope inside many hearts. I think this indicates how many people are living in fear and pain.

A few days ago (Aug. 18, 2006), workers at a gourmet chocolate company in Fountain Valley, California, found a two-inch-tall column of chocolate drippings which they say resembles Mary. Kitchen worker Cruz Jacinto says she has struggled with marital problems and the discovery came just in time. “I’ve been saying that God doesn’t exist,” she said. “This has given me renewed faith.” The lump of melted chocolate looks just like the Virgin Mary on the prayer card she always carries in her pocket, Jacinto says. “For me, it was a sign.”



Not to be outdone, my father-in-law, Howard Bybee, cut into a small loaf of bread three years ago in Italy and saw something remarkable. Granted, it may fall short of a divine vision, but I bet it has the power to put a smile on your face.



What should we make of the many alleged signs and miracles? We need to see people the way Jesus did, as sheep without a shepherd, hungry for help and hope. “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!” Jesus said, “They are ripe for harvest.” He wants us to do something about it.

Let’s help people find him. That’s what they are looking for.

*Gary Williams
Florence Bible School
Italy*