

# REFLECTION

## ON LOSING A TOOTH AND FINDING WISDOM...

Flying to Darwin on the way to Dili, I took eager hold of the frozen Cornetto and chomped in. The little 'pop' sound I heard was irregular, but cute. The Cornetto was like basalt. The beautiful 'pop' sound was the full half of my left front tooth snapping off in a familiar diagonal cut. (I left the original half in someone's scalp fifteen years ago playing 'touch' football). This was terrible. I know what it looks like . . . like you've been sleeping in a gutter for a few years! I groaned loudly. (*Loud and obviously long enough for the attendant to warn me that people get alarmed in confined spaces. I exclaimed to her, 'yes, but, LOOK AT MY FACE!'*) The surrounding students helped by laughing loudly. They suggested I try an eye patch and pretend to be a pirate. Cheaper certainly than dental work!

With no prospect of finding such dental work for nearly three weeks I had to enter this time by letting go of the 'beauty image' I have of myself and project into every encounter. I was confronted by how I hope to be seen by others, and the threatening proximity of my own vanity. Whilst my period of readjustment did involve some wailing, it was over in a very short space of time. On with the trip! What I learnt? People are very capable of meeting a person as they are and not as they appear. I found myself looking at others, not grasping at their appearance, but more acutely, their substance. This was a profound experience. It meant I was far more open to the wonder, the beauty, the richness in the people about me. It was a genuine spiritual discipline.

As we approach another federal election, is it possible to encounter the substance of people as they are, rather than as they appear? Is this too much to ask? Does the dichotomy of public and private naturally segregate the substance of person from the appearance of the professional 'persona'? It need not.

There is not a single word on Jesus' appearance. The one who points to God and asks us to follow, does so in the weight of his substance, the authenticity of his character. We are asked to follow, and in so doing, enter deep friendship with God and fuller humanity. Following also is the invitation to relate first as people committed in substance.

*Never once, did Jesus say, "Worship me, I am the One." Adoration was not sought or ever needed by the Son. All he wanted was the heart, no chant or hollow plea, the gift he asked? . . . 'Release your grasp. Relax, and follow me.'* (Stuart Barrie)

[Father Richard Browning](#)