

# From the Chapel – June 17: Laying it bare



*[“From the Chapel”](#) is a series of short, daily reflections on life and faith in a time of uncertainty. As people across the world cope with the effects of the coronavirus – including the social isolation necessary to combat its spread – these reflections remind us of the hope that lies at the heart of the Gospel.*

As I turned south out of our driveway on my midday run, I noticed that the red paint of the trim over the steps to our front porch is peeling. I almost wrote “has begun to peel,” but that would be an understatement. As so often happens, by the time you notice that paint (especially on the outside of a house) has begun to peel, it’s a full-blown project.

One of the delights of owning a house built in 1882 is that you never have to worry about having nothing to do on the weekend. Two summers ago, our older boys, Jacob and Stephen, painted the woodwork on the porch, and if we want to avoid having to dedicate an entire summer to painting (or sacrifice a couple of months of pay for someone else to do it), we’re going to have to paint part of the house every year.

The only time I’ve ever thought fondly of vinyl siding is when I’m painting. When the project is finished, though, I’m always glad that we have wood siding and wood trim. It’s worth the effort to keep the house looking like it did on the day it was completed, 138 years ago.

But effort it certainly is, assuming you want to do it right. When paint is peeling, you can’t simply cover it with a fresh coat. Or rather, you can, but then the new paint won’t last. And so you scrape and brush and sand until you’re either down

to bare wood or the paint that remains is firmly bonded to the trim. And then you prime it, perhaps even with two coats to smooth out the rough lines of the surface, and finally apply the actual paint.

As in so much of life, Daniel-san, there are lessons to be learned here, though with all due respect to Mr. Miyagi, few of them apply to karate. We spend a lot of time applying a fresh coat of paint to the rough patches in our lives, but unless we've first made the effort to lay the underlying problem bare, it's just going to resurface again and again.

Most of us have had that experience in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we've met the minimum requirements and our sins were indeed forgiven, but we find ourselves confessing those same sins again and again, because we haven't truly done the necessary work to root them out of our soul. And when we get caught up in a cycle like that with one sin, we never turn our attention to others. If I paint the trim over the porch badly this summer, I may find myself up on that same ladder in the same place again a couple of summers from now, rather than moving on to the windows or the siding. A few summers like that, and the house will end up beyond my ability to refresh it.

So next Saturday, the ladder comes out, and the scrapers and the brushes and the sandpaper. But I'll knock off at 3, not just because that's the hottest part of the day, but because that's when confessions in Huntington begin. I have some scraping and sanding to do there as well.

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