

Share your smile

by Barry Robinson

On one of my brief forays out of the house to get some food, I was rushing around the local Tesco Express to buy what I needed as quickly as possible, so I could get in and out without meeting too many people in the aisles.

This coronavirus has made us do some strange things. All was going well until at the self-checkout I heard the mechanical voice say, “Unexpected item in the bagging area—assistance required”, and over came the checkout assistant to sort me out. As I stepped back the required two metres, he smiled at me and automatically I just smiled back. When I arrived home and thought about that little episode, it reminded me of a poem attributed to Spike Milligan called “Infectious Smiles”. Here’s the first verse:

Smiling is infectious,
you catch it like the flu,

When someone smiled at me today,
I started smiling too.

Perhaps an epidemic of smiles like this was on the mind of Robertino Rodriguez, a respiratory therapist from San Diego. He recognised that for those COVID-19

sufferers who are taken into hospital, it can be a scary experience, especially as family or friends cannot accompany them. The situation is made worse when the only people the patient sees are the medical team, and they are covered from head-to-toe in protective gear that conceals most of their faces. And so, Robertino did something different and quite extraordinary. He said: “I felt bad for my patients in ER when I would come in the room with my face covered in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), because a re-assuring smile makes a big difference to a scared patient. So...I made a giant laminated badge for my PPE so my patients can see a reassuring and comforting smile”.

Robertino attached a photo of himself wearing a suit and tie and a beaming smile to his PPE to remind his patients that there is a compassionate human being under all that gear. He went on to say: “One thing health care workers do to make our patients feel at ease is to reassure them with our smiles but now that we have to wear masks, we are unable to do this...A smile goes a long way in comforting a scared patient—bringing some brightness in these dark times”.

Robertino’s Instagram post went viral, and soon after, other doctors and nurses were attaching pictures of themselves smiling on their hospital garb, in a movement he calls “share your smile”. As the medical world was becoming infected by his smile, Robertino said: “People love seeing that you went that extra mile to show them that you care”.¹

That phrase “go the extra mile” comes from the lips of Jesus Christ in the ancient writings of the Bible,² and means making a special effort to go above and beyond what is required. Whether Robertino realised it or not, going above and beyond what was required of him as he shared his smile is showing Christian compassion at its best. It’s an example I intend to follow. I hope to infect the world with my smile.

NOTES

¹ For Robertino Rodriguez’s story see https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/medical-workers-pics-smiling-covid-19-patients_1_5e8f725bc5b6b371812da523.

² Matthew 5:41.

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