



Moffa snapped a photo of Mr. Giordano sitting on a pier with his arm around the picture frame gazing thoughtfully at the sea. He posted the image on the internet, and... as they say...it went viral.

Some people swooned at the incredible story of deep and abiding love that would move a man to such ardent behavior. Others were concerned for his mental health, believing that Giuseppe should be pitied instead of admired and given compassionate grief counseling. Some women were thrilled with how romantic the daily gesture truly was and charged their own husbands with carrying their image back to the place they met. Other women felt it was a terrible, senseless memorial and told their husbands that they had better not waste their time... should they be predeceased, as well. Still others were outraged that a poor lonely man's privacy was violated on social media!

Whatever your reaction is to a story like Giuseppe's, a few things are perfectly clear from God's Word. Ida is not at the beach every day with Giuseppe....it is a **picture** of Ida in a frame. Ida is somewhere else altogether! Her body is in a grave waiting for the resurrection of the dead, and her spirit is either present with the Lord in heaven...or with the rich man in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16...In which case

she would be telling Giuseppe to put down the picture frame and pick up the Bible!

We also know that none of this daily routine brings real peace or satisfaction to Giuseppe. He is broken hearted, lonely, suffering a haunting internal pain and longing for something real...the **substance** of living companionship, when all he has to grasp on to is **the image**.

Grace is described as unmerited favor, or favor against merit. Getting something wonderful from God that you did not deserve. Did it ever occur to you, that your whole life is filled with the image of God, in **His common grace**... when what your heart truly longs for is the **substance... the real grace of God... His special grace...His saving grace!**

How beautiful...is this wonderful planet that our Creator has gifted to mankind! Psalm 19:1 tells us that: **“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork!”** Is there anything more vibrant than a blazing splash of bright yellow, orange and red hues over a deep blue sea at sunset? Is there anything more soothing to the eye than a crisp blue sky over a verdant evergreen forested horizon? What compares to the radiance of a rainbow, painting a full spectrum of colors across the

heavens? What dazzles brighter than all the celestial glory of the milky way on a clear night? All of these... and so much more of God's creation is only **an image** of the beauty of the Creator!

And how gracious... is our glorious God in providing man's every need! Psalm 145:8 and 9 declares that: **"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works."** Consider your own life and all that God has blessed you with... **every good gift comes from God, and you have plenty!** If you didn't believe that, you probably wouldn't be here tonight. The delicious taste of good food, the smell of a fragrant bouquet, the sound of a beautiful song, and the joy of a beautiful sight... all provided by the grace of God! The secure warmth of clothing and shelter... the soothing touch of a familiar hand... the capacity to think and imagine, to create and accomplish amazing things... all given to you, by God's grace. But these things are intended, not as the complete measure of God's grace, but only as the **image** of a gracious God who would have you know Him fully!

The substance of God's grace is salvation! In Ephesians 2 we read that those who have been **"made alive together with Christ (by**

grace they have been saved), and raised up together, and made them to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the *exceeding* riches of His grace....in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus!"

Listen dear friends, the **substance** of God's grace, *the real grace of God* is in knowing Him unto salvation! Everything else that you enjoy in this world of His common grace is simply designed to point you to Him!

Think of every earthly blessing that you have... is it not diminishing?... slipping out of your grasp as the years go by? How soon is youthful vitality and physical strength abated? How fleeting is the beauty of youth!? Our health is not guaranteed! Riches cannot be trusted... many fortunes have been lost in an instant! Worldly hopes and dreams have been shattered, lifelong plans have come to nothing... relationships are broken and loved ones pass away. Yes, even your life will inevitably come to an end!

Will it be said of you that you settled for the **image** of God's grace, enjoying all the blessings an earthly life can bring?... and missed the **very substance of God's grace** to which they were pointing! Will you have merely the image and forsake the substance

of God's amazing grace? **The substance of God's grace is Himself... the Lord Jesus Christ!** It is being in Christ by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10 goes on to tell us: **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."**

If you are thinking to yourself that you *have* enjoyed a great deal of God's blessing... but you're not certain in your own heart and mind that you are **saved**... and will enjoy Him and the fellowship of believers in eternity. Then you should be asking: "How can I be sure that I have not settled for the **image** of God's grace...like carrying around a framed picture of a loved one,... and having no real fellowship with God?"

*The answer is in the question... **God's grace!*** Listen carefully... the reason that all earthly blessing is fleeting is because of sin. This creation is indeed blessed with God's grace. But it is also cursed with God's judgment because of man's sin. Now before we blame Adam and Eve, let's consider our own sin! **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory**

of God!", God's word tells us in Romans 3.23. God is perfectly righteous and cannot have fellowship with sinful man. But that's exactly where God's special grace, His saving grace comes to meet our need.

Like the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5:20, I implore you to be reconciled to God!... but how?! Verse 21 tells us: "**...He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**" He, that's God,... **made Him**... that's Jesus Christ,... **who knew no sin**...He lived a perfect sinless life because He was God incarnate,... **to be sin for us**,...that's everyone that believes in Jesus Christ and has experienced repentance and faith...**that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**...that's grace! ***Here is the miracle of trading places:*** God treated Jesus as if he had lived our sinful life when He bore our punishment on the cross. He then treats us as if we had lived His perfect life and receives us into His fellowship forever! **That's saving grace and the substance to which every image of God's grace points!**

Have you traded places with Jesus Christ? Or are you trusting in your own goodness, your own righteousness. If so, it will never do. God is perfect. You say, "but I don't know *how* to trade places Jesus...I don't even quite know how to believe in Him." Dear friend

you can't do it! **"For by *grace* are you saved, through faith, and that *not of yourselves*; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast."**

Don't settle for the image of God's grace and neglect the substance... saving grace in Jesus Christ. If you are **not saved**... or if you are **not sure** that you're saved.... ask God to save you! That's what God has been pointing you to... all your life!

