

## Botox: Pick your poison

*The skin may show fewer wrinkles, but is the vanity involved ruining our souls?*

This is one party you may want to miss. If you live in Los Angeles, you may have already received an invitation to join a few of your close friends and your plastic surgeon for a little wine, cheese and a shot of poison to the forehead. Yes, people are actually attending "Botox soirees," which have been likened by some to a plastic surgeon's version of *la fete du Tupperware*.

Last April, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of botulinum toxin for purely cosmetic purposes. Botox, in short, is poison, the same toxin that causes botulism. But when greatly diluted and injected under the skin, it temporarily paralyzes muscles, relaxing furrowed foreheads and smoothing facial wrinkles for four to six months — and all for just \$200 to \$1,000 a shot. What a bargain!

The body-insecurity business — and make no mistake, it is a *business*, a lucrative one — is booming. "Advances" like Botox are only fueling the insecurity fire.

No one would argue the benefits of restorative procedures for those who suffer from illness, injury or deformity. But where will we draw the line? Who is deciding what's beautiful? Is it really one thing, for

example, to color your hair and quite another bizarre and dangerous step to inject poison under your skin? Both are temporary, so what's the big deal?

Remember, plastic-surgery techniques were initially developed in response to the ravages of war, to help heal the severely disfigured, maimed and broken. But now we are at war with aging, with our very bodies and with the despair and emptiness that comes from worshipping youthfulness.

It is a war so terrifying and desperate for so many because inherently we know there are no "winners." We all grow old and die. The real terror comes in answering the question: then what?

If scientists could clone the devotion of Mary, the wisdom of Solomon and the bravery of Esther and put that into a syringe to be injected in our hearts, I'd be the first to sign up. But they don't need to. The Holy Spirit is already waiting and available to inject us with the fruits of

the Spirit, including beauty. All we need do is ask. Oh, Botox, be not proud! Beauty is not something one can inject, purchase, manipulate, liposuck or dermabrase into being — no matter what informercials may say.

I, for one, am having a ball growing older, wiser, gaining more perspective and experiencing a deeper faith. I hope I'm doing it gracefully, even with the wrinkles, gray hair and deteriorating joints.

Still, I'm unmarried and approaching middle age. Any youthful blossom I had has long ago begun to wither. There are certainly days I pause in front of the mirror and entertain a tremulous panic over what may lie ahead for a woman like me when her looks are long gone. Everything in my culture tells me that my value, my worth will have withered right along with them.

And that is the real poison, the greater paralysis. And it's costing us all a holy fortune. » *By Liz Kelly (oursunvis@osv.com), who writes for Dartmouth College in New Hampshire*

