

## Abandoning the Mask

**In the dark hours of the night in Bethlehem during Christmas, St. Jerome had been celebrating the birthday of Jesus in a little grotto where Jesus asked him, what will you give me for my birthday.**

-St. Jerome replied that he would give Jesus his new translation of the bible. But Jesus did not want that.

-St. Jerome talked about all the fasts and penances that he would give to our Lord but Jesus said, "That is not what I want the most."

-Then Jerome said, "Tell me what would give you the most joy on your birthday, and you shall have it." Then Jesus replied, "Give me your sins."

***-Brothers and sisters, our Lord desires today that we give him our sins because they separate us from him, and abandon our masks of hypocrisy so as to abandon ourselves to his providence.***

**We find in the Gospel that Pharisees use their religious practices to gain human validation INSTEAD OF divine validation.**

-If we look a chapter earlier in this passage, Jesus chastises the Pharisees who love the seat of honor in synagogues and marketplaces or show to others that they are precise in giving a tenth of their harvest to the Lord yet neglect to practice justice, mercy and love.

-The Pharisees and ourselves can be tempted to put on masks of righteousness in order to feel loved and appreciated by others, and sometimes we would rather prioritize our fear of losing human validation above our fear of losing God's validation.

-This hypocrisy could be understood as "[loving] the praise of men more than the praise of God" (Jn 12:43) and fearing those who can kill the body more than the one who can kill the body and the soul.

**Jesus in the Gospel today wants us to remove our mask of hypocrisy which prevents him from healing us from our sins.**

-The difference between a sinner and a hypocrite is that a sinner knows he's a sinner while a hypocrite thinks he's a saint.

-We are all sinners, yet a Pharisee would try to mask their sinfulness by appearing to be righteous rather than actually becoming righteous.

**Yet hypocrisy is not always done out of malice or total self-vanity, but it may be a symptom of hiding our sinfulness from the gaze of our loving God.**

-I remember I had a friend who told me once that his girlfriend would never let him see her without her make up on.

-Sometimes we feel like we need to put on our spiritual make up on so that others will love us because we do not believe that God or others could love such a sinful person.

-This is something I have had to learn over and over again that God is not calling me to the priesthood because I am worthy by my own works, but because his grace and love makes me worthy and his grace is calling you to do great things too.

**Jesus is re-educating and revealing the vastness of the Father's love to the crowd which the Pharisees, including ourselves, have forgotten.**

-In response to a question about who is Jorge Bergolio, Pope Francis answered, "This is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze."

-Jesus looks at us even in our sinfulness and calls us to let go of our masks and jump into the providential arms of the Father who values you more than sparrows: "Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

-You are not the sum of your weaknesses, but you are the sum total of the Father's love for you so allow his love to guide, give him permission to watch over you.

**Father Jacques Phillip in his book "Searching for and Maintaining Peace" uses an image I call the parachute of divine Providence:**

We cannot experience this support from God unless we leave Him the necessary space in which He can express Himself...

As long as a person who must jump with a parachute does not jump out into the void, he cannot feel that the cords of the parachute will support him, because the parachute has not yet had the chance to open.

One must first jump and it is only later that one feels carried. And so it is in spiritual life...

Saint Francis de Sales says: "The measure of Divine Providence acting on us is the degree of confidence that we have in it."