

Masks unmasked

I presume most of us look back on the lessons we have learned from having to live in a Covid world for the past two years. We have learned many things, valued more and appreciated greatly.

Sitting in my living room on a Sunday evening as the dark clouds of evening began to roll in, I became more pensive and enlightened about the whole experience.

I began to reflect on one thing and what it taught us about our faith journey. The concept that came to mind was the experience of mask wearing that became a necessity during the Covid years.

Initially, masks were bland, blue surgical type masks and were recommended to be disposed of after each use. As time went on, creativity set in. Later, masks became diverse in colour and style. Some were black; some white; some multi coloured. Some even became advertising for different businesses and groups. Even some individuals created their own functional masks.

One of the most frustrating experience with mask wearing was for those of us who wear glasses. Glasses were becoming fogged up constantly. Eventually, some creative persons came up with a spray that would stop glasses from fogging up. Others suggested a less costly approach by folding tissue a certain way, enclosing it into the mask in such a way that would capture the fogged breath so one could see more clearly. Even some YouTube videos demonstrated other solutions.

Another inconvenience associated with mask wearing was the need to have a plentiful supply available to meet every possible situation. That included have a supply at home and in automobiles. I noticed that some hung the mask on the inside mirror of their automobile. Even some tucked it on their wrist to make sure they didn't forget it.

One of the more obvious insights into mask wearing was that, in many cases, you didn't know the face of the person behind the mask. All one saw as two custodial eyes peering out through the mask. Masks created, not only a sense of being autonomous but also a sense of suspicion behind the mask. Mask wearing created an aura of, not only protection, but also, distance.

So, you may ask, what has mask wearing to do with one's faith journey. Let's see!

Ever since the beginning of creation, God was a masked God. He adopted different disguises. Sometimes, he was called Yahweh; other times, he was called Adonai. El Shaddai, Elohim, Abba, Jehovah, and others. All the names were attempts to capture and understand the Person behind the masks. Sometimes, it seemed that if the person behind the mask wished to remain hidden and a mystery, they kept changing their masks. When people asked him what was his name, they received a confusing and insightful answer – "I am who am."

Still people were determined to discover the real Person behind the mask. They discovered Him in various disguises. He was a cloud that guided them by day and a ball of fire by night. He was food from quails and water from rocks. He was thunder when he demanded respect and obedience. He was a stern parent who exiled them to get their attention and brought them back to show his gentler and forgiving side,

Eventually, we get a glimpse of the unmasked God in the beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews where it says, "In times past, God spoke in fragmentary ways to our ancestors through the prophets. In these last days through a son which he made heir to all things and through whom he created the universe who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being and who sustains all things by his mighty word." (Hebrews 1:1-3)

As we celebrate the Christmas season, I begin to realize that fragmentary ways are now normal ways. Now, we get a glimpse of the Person behind the masks. He may not generate the sense of fear experienced in Old Testament times but he still demands respect. He is no longer seen through fogged lenses or shrouded in the same mystery. No longer does a human created virus keep him at a distance. Instead, He is one like us in all things but sin.

After all, what is Christmas? It is more than turkeys, family meals and family gatherings, presents to be paid for later, Christmas music that generates nostalgia and raises spirits.

But the most beautiful and comforting aspect of Christmas is the unmasking of God.