

The Great Unmasking

Welcome to the season of Lent!

It's also known as the season of the great unmasking.

It's a time every year when we are invited to go to the desert.

And no, we don't need to fly to Phoenix, nor do we need to explore Africa.

Each of us has our own desert right inside of us.

Freud and Carl Jung called it the "unconscious mind."

The mystics, like St. John of the Cross, call it the "dark night of the soul."

But whatever name we give to our personal deserts, the season of Lent is the time to explore who we are — in our depths.

It is the time to face ourselves, courageously and thoroughly, so that we can come to that place where we become whole people.

Allow me to explain.

That which makes us human is not so much that we have two arms, two legs and a brain.

That which makes us human is our consciousness.

Yet, as Freud and Carl Jung discovered, we are only aware of a limited part of our consciousness.

That is, unless we are willing to take the deep dive into the unconscious part of ourselves.

Our conscious self, otherwise known as the Ego, is the part we know quite well.

It's the person that I like to think I am; and it's the person that I spend most of my life telling the world who I am.

It's often fragile and insecure.

It's a mask.

And unmasking happens when we take that deep dive into our unconscious selves.

The part of us that lies beneath the surface.

The part that most people spend a lifetime ignoring or avoiding.

We're all familiar with the word "hypocrite."

In English it has come to mean someone who says one thing and does something else.

But "hypocrite" is actually Greek for "actor."

And actors in the old Greek tragedies and comedies all wore masks.

The masks depicting the emotion that the various actors are supposed to display: anger or joy, rage or serenity.

In a very real sense, our Ego, our conscious self, plays the role of those Greek actors in our lives.

And so Lent is the time to try to get underneath all of that.

To get behind the masks.

To find out more about what really makes me tick.

And there's actually a very simple way to get started in this wonderful journey.

I just need to pay attention to who and what upsets me.

Is it that know-it-all up the street?

Is it the guy who cut me off in traffic?

Is it that racist blabbering on Tic Toc?

Is it my mom or dad, my spouse or kids?

Because here's the thing.

Whatever upsets me, upsets me because it's touching something inside of me that I don't like about myself.

This is a universal truth.

And the normal human response, or should I say, the typical human response, is to project the things that upset me about myself onto you, and blame you for how I'm feeling.

But if we are to take to heart the purpose of Lent, then we'll take that deep dive into the unconscious self, and look for those parts of ourselves that trigger those reactions.

It is what I don't like in myself that upsets me about others.

And sometimes looking at those parts of myself can be extremely frightening.

Some of those frightening parts of me go all the way back to childhood, deep wounds that have festered for many years.

To go there often feels like ripping the Band-Aid off of a still open cut.

But something wonderful happens when we actually summon the courage to go back and look at those parts of ourselves.

They come down to size.

Even if those parts of ourselves feel like vicious monsters lurking in frighteningly dark rooms, when we allow ourselves to go back there and sit in those rooms for awhile, we begin to see that it's not so scary after all.

We come to see that the "monsters" are simply emotional wounds that we ourselves can heal.

And when I go there, lo and behold, I find not only a deeper sense of compassion for the people who once irritated me, but I find a deeper sense of compassion for myself as well.

This is the invitation of Lent!

It's fine if you want to give up red wine or chocolates.

Self-discipline, particularly in our consumer oriented, forget about waiting for tomorrow, have it all now culture, is a good thing.

So's trying out new and different things during Lent to expand our horizons.

Become a reader or show up at Saturday breakfast.

But these are external efforts.

The deeper challenge of Lent is to go inside.

The deeper challenge of our faith is to Metanoia, to enter into the larger mind of God.

To be transformed.

Which only happens when we come to live within what was previously hidden from us, when we discover and explore the depths of our unconscious.

And as we bring the unconscious into our conscious mind, what we begin to see is a wholeness that develops.

A place where we begin to see the world a little bit through the eyes of God.

These reflections were brought home for me this week when I read this headline: "Yet another Christian denomination has Forsaken the Christian faith."

That headline caught my eye and I immediately read the article.

Wouldn't you know it?

The denomination that has left the Christian faith — is us?!

The Anglican communion!

Because the Church of England decided to bless same-sex marriage.

Which, according to the article writer, makes us no longer Christian.

A similar article that same day had this headline: "Any Pastor Who Seeks Therapy is Unfit for the Pulpit."

That article discussed how various Christians claim that if Jesus can't be all you need, then you don't belong in Christian leadership.

Of course, what both of these articles are manifestations of is how profoundly powerful our conscious mind/our Ego mind, is — especially in matters of faith and spirituality.

There is this deep human need to divide people into "us against them," "insiders and outsiders," the "saved and the damned."

And as our institutions have grown up and moved away from the completely radical and inclusive teachings of Jesus, as we've over the centuries created institutional structures and rules that are more palatable for us, we pretend **our need** for exclusion is something God blesses.

Which, of course, ignores the very clear promise of Jesus, that: "When I am lifted up, I will drag all people to myself." Jn. 12:32.

"All people" means just that.

People of every race, gender, sexual orientation, creed, and color.

He'll have us all.

But we can't accept that unless we take that deep dive into the unconscious.

Ever since humanity began to walk this earth, a small minority find themselves from birth attracted to people of the same gender, just as the majority of people find themselves attracted to people of the opposite gender.

And for far too long, that small minority has had to mask who they really are.

And wouldn't you know it, the loudest voices against LGBTQ+ people are those who secretly feel themselves to be LGBTQ+ people.

Those unconscious feelings threaten them.

And so they mask who they truly are with angry voices of bigotry and condemnation, all dressed up with the supposed blessing of God.

Just so with those who are afraid of therapy.

Because with therapy we're required to take that deep dive into the unconscious self.

And those who would condemn that dive are those who are afraid of who they really are.

So this Lent, let's be courageous.

Take the deep dive.

Find out who you really are.

Because when you do, you'll discover the truth of your identity.

That you are, and always will be, a beloved child of God.

Thanks be to God!

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