Masked Faces and the Holy Face

 ** THE ***INTENTIONAL***DISCIPLE

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 ***“To bring Jesus the Christ to the other in thought, word and deed” …….………………………………………… JULY 2020***

*(Paraphrased from an article from* ***www.thecatholicthing.org*** *by* ***David G. Bonagura Jr****, a teacher at St. Joseph’s Seminary, New York.)*

The news ripped through my computer like an electrical shock. In the midst of the lockdown, through my parish’s daily Mass uploaded to YouTube, the father of a former student was announced among the sick in need of prayers. A few days later, I learned in the same manner that Joe Senior had died. I sought in vain to find news; there was no wake, funeral, or public obituary. My heart ached for both Joe, Joe’s wife, and his son.

A few weeks later, as I assisted with seating for Sunday Mass (at 25 percent of church capacity), in walked Joe Junior with his mom. My eyes locked on hers, and I felt my face curl in sympathy. A mask concealed my face from her, and hers from me. We could not embrace. I attempted to express my sorrow and learn what happened, but it was impossible to do so behind the voice-muffling mask. The strip of cloth that was protecting our health was, at the same time, sickening our souls. The masks created an awkward and painful moment. This is not an argument against wearing masks to prevent the spread of coronavirus. We must do what we must do.

It is, first, another reminder (the pandemic has been prolific in generating them) of something precious that we take for granted: facial expressions, which are the most quintessentially human of gestures. Like sacraments, they make visible the invisible yearnings of the heart, often before a single word forms on our lips. Whether in a moment of grief, triumph, or joy, countenance opens a window to the soul. Cloaked faces hide our true selves, and form a barrier to fulfilling our vocation as men and women called to communion with each other in Jesus Christ.

My masked encounter also prompted me to think of a face that went uncovered despite threatening dangers: our Lord’s holy face, unprotected from the spittle and blows of His captors. There is a pious devotion to the holy face of Jesus that I had forgotten. I realized instantly that our current pandemic and civilizational crisis is the perfect impetus for taking it up.

**An image of our Lord’s holy face is miraculously preserved on Veronica’s veil, now kept inside St. Peter’s Basilica.** A beautiful prayer to the holy face is particularly apt for our times. *“O Jesus . . . I venerate the sacred face whereon there once did shine the beauty and sweetness of the Godhead; but now it has become as it were the face of a leper! Nevertheless, under those disfigured features, I recognize Thine infinite love.”*

Veronica had neither office nor power. Yet her seemingly tiny gesture of compassion towards our Lord’s holy face remains impactful today, unlike any of the political actions of her day. As we gaze upon the holy face, let us remember that the only way to overcome our current alienation is through a greater love of God. (Image: [***Saint Veronica with the Veil***](https://collections.lacma.org/node/248629)by Mattia Pretti, c. 1653)