

Tempted.

Some years back Barbara and I travelled to Cape Breton. It was fascinating to learn that the island/peninsula was split. The eastern side of the island was English speaking people of Gaelic descent, while the western side of the island was French speaking people, Acadians. In the town of Cheticamp on the western shores of the island we discovered a culture we were not familiar with and saw handicrafts that are from a different era. Marion Jenkins would be thrilled to learn that her fellow east coasters were big hookers – by which I mean they hooked rugs and placemats and coasters and all manner of things. They also made masks, like this one, out of paper mache. The masks were made for a mid-Lenten tradition called Mi-Carême which is a time when people dress up in disguise and go from house to house asking for treats, singing and dancing in the Mumming tradition.

I've had this mask for many years and always wanted to talk about traditional mid-Lent tradition, and never have, until this year. The mask made me think about the many masks we wear. When we leave the house for an evening out, men shave, put on their best bib and tucker, perhaps get their hair cut; women put on a dress and paint their faces with lipstick and rouge and other cosmetics. When dressed and made up in this way, we present a particular image of ourselves: we are wearing a mask. When we go to work, we wear a different mask; show a different aspect or image of ourselves to our colleagues. When we go to church, we wear yet another mask. Seldom do we ever NOT wear a mask, unless we are in the privacy of our own homes with only our family, and even then... Ultimately, it is only with God that we wear no mask, for no mask will fool God about who we truly are.

When Jesus was driven, by God's Spirit, into the wilderness, he met the deceiver who tried to tempt Jesus into turning stones into bread, into stepping off the top of the temple, into worshipping the deceiver in order to gain power and control over the entire world.

Masks can be a great equalizer. We wear masks to obscure our identity. Nobody knows who is behind the mask. It obscures all of those things that we look at to differentiate ourselves from one another; things like gender, race, age, class, and so on.

But masks come with temptations too:

The flip side of masks being an equalizer is the temptation to wear masks to conceal our true identity from others. Eg. we pretend to be someone who is trustworthy while attempting to defraud them, bank robbers, politicians, etc.

In addition to concealing our identity, masks can also obscure our vision; prevent us from seeing things clearly, and we can be tempted to see things as we want them to be and not as they truly are. Can you think of an example?

Can you think of other temptations that might come with wearing a mask?

Jesus did not give in to the temptations he faced in the wilderness. May we not give in to the temptations we face: the temptation to not see things as they really are; the temptation to conceal our true identity for unrighteous reasons...

Most importantly, may we not give in to the temptation to see others as different than ourselves, to revere or revile them because they are like us or not. For we are all alike: created by God from the dust of the earth, filled with the holy breath of God, and beloved of God.