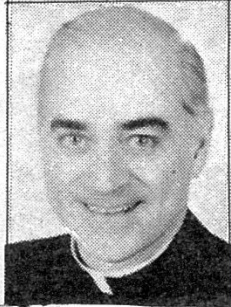


Father John Catoir

Masks

I think it was Father John Powell, S.J., who wrote: "I'm afraid to tell you who I am because you may not like who I am, and I'm all I've got." Along these lines, the following piece entitled "Masks" was sent to me recently. I don't know who the author is but I thought you might find it interesting.



"Masks"

Don't be fooled by me.
 Don't be fooled by the face I wear.
 For I wear a thousand masks, masks that
 I'm afraid to take off.
 And none of them are me.
 Pretending is an art that's second nature
 with me, but don't be fooled.
 I give the impression that I'm secure, /
 that all is sunny and unruffled with me,
 within as well as without, / that confi-
 dence is my name and coolness my game;
 and that I need no one.
 But don't believe me. Please.
 I panic at the thought of my weakness
 and fear of being exposed.
 That's why I frantically create a mask to
 hide behind, / a nonchalant, sophisticated
 facade, / to help me pretend, to shield me
 from the glance that knows.
 But such a glance is precisely my salva-
 tion. My only salvation and I know it.
 That is, if it's followed by acceptance, if
 it's followed by love.
 It's the only thing that will assure me of
 what I can't assure myself — that I am

worth something.

But I don't tell you this. I don't dare. I'm afraid to.

I'm afraid your glance will not be followed by acceptance and love.

I'm afraid you'll think less of me, that you'll laugh at me, / and your laugh would kill me.

I'm afraid that deep-down I'm nothing, that I'm no good, / and that you will see this and reject me.

So I play my game, my desperate game

And so begins the parade of masks, and my life becomes a front.

I dislike hiding. Honestly!

I dislike the superficial game I'm playing, the phony game.

I'd really like to be genuine and spontaneous, and me.

But you've got to help me. You've got to hold out your hand, / even when that's the last thing I seem to want,

Only you can wipe away from my eyes the blank stare of breathing death.

Only you can call me into aliveness.

Each time you're kind, and gentle and encouraging, / each time you try to understand because you really care, / my heart begins to grow wings, very small wings, very feeble wings, but wings.

With your sensitivity and sympathy, and your power of understanding / you can breath life into me. I want you to know that.

Please ... do not pass me by.

Please try to beat down those walls with firm hands, / but with gentle hands ... for a child is very sensitive.

Who am I, you may wonder. I am someone you know very well.

For I am every man you meet and I am every woman you meet. —Anonymous

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