

God is not taken in by masks.

Despite the fact that Jesus was open to all people, including Samaritans, Roman centurions, lepers, adulterers, outcasts in general as much as to his own “correct” people, his disciples *even after Jesus’ resurrection* clung to their racial prejudices. They were still wary of not only non-Jewish people but of even Jews born in places other than the Holy Land itself: Greek – speaking, cosmopolitan Jews, as too foreign, too unclean, too compromised to be trusted. So after their several years of association with him, his disciples still had a lot to learn about the man they followed.

And the opportunity came shortly after Jesus left them for realms above. Gentiles like the family of the Roman centurion Cornelius wanted to become Christian. Peter would have recoiled in horror from such contact had it not been for a dream God gave him in which a table cloth opened out of heaven displaying every sort of non-kosher food including reptiles and the birds of the sky. But a voice said, “Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat . . . What God has made clean, you are not to call profane.” And so Peter, influenced by that dream, traveled to Cornelius’ home and as he explained the Gospel the Holy Spirit descended upon all these Gentiles. He was overwhelmed by their enthusiasm. And he made a revolutionary discovery. As he put it: *Indeed, now I know that God shows no partiality* (or as some translate it: *God does not show favoritism*). The translation I like is: *God is not taken in by masks!*

Which reminds me of that episode in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in which Huck along with the runaway slave Jim are hiding out on an island in the Mississippi. Soon Huck is wondering what’s going on among his friends in town. He decides to leave his island refuge to get the latest news, disguising himself by dressing as a girl. En route he stays at the home of a Mrs. Loftus, identifies himself as Sarah Williams then later as Mary Williams until after a short span of observation Mrs. Loftus says: *What’s your real name? . . . I ain’t going to hurt you, and I ain’t going to tell on you, nuther. . . . Why I spotted you for a boy when you was threading the needle . . . and if you get into trouble, you send word to Mrs. Judith Loftus, which is me and I’ll do what I can to get you out of it.*

God is not taken in by masks and neither is Mrs. Loftus. How many faces do we present to the world every day? Faces that disguise what’s really behind them, the real you? We get so used to wearing masks to conceal the “actual me” that *even we* wouldn’t recognize ourselves if our masks were removed! How often have I recoiled from photographs of myself that didn’t look like Errol Flynn or Robert Redford, the faces I preferred myself to share? And then I looked into a mirror!

On the other hand, living as we do in this age of so many mixed races and ethnic groups – locally and in the media – how often do we view different features and complexions superficially as masks without allowing that there is an individual person, a life, pain, joy, dejection, pride, fears, feelings, intelligence, even wisdom residing behind such traits; persons we might enjoy knowing if we removed the biased mask, the biased interpretation we impose upon them – and if we removed the mask we ourselves wear?

St. Paul had something to say about all this, about a day when we shall realize that what we see is so superficial, in our own and the features of others; that we *scan* rather than *see* people and things in general – how he says at the end of his exquisite poem on love: *At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.*