

4<sup>th</sup> August 2020

## Masks

**"I met Murder on the way –  
He had a mask like Castlereagh –  
Very smooth he looked, yet grim,  
Seven bloodhounds followed him."**

*Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Mask of Anarchy*

I'm trying to get used to wearing a mask. The one I first wore steamed up my glasses, till my wife and the church Crafters Group got on the case. Goodness! They can *customise* your mask – wearing glasses or not, to fit big noses and small, ties at the back or elastic over your ears, and *any* colour or design you like! Amazing! Masks are a fashion item! What would the *Gucci* or the *Giorgio Armani* equivalent of my face-mask be, I wonder?

But then, I've been wearing masks all my adult life, masks called *personae* – the Latin plural of *persona*, the aspect of our character that's presented to or perceived by others. In a stressful day, I wear the *persona* of being calm – the swan that glides serenely across a pond while underneath it's paddling like billy-o to keep going. Or the *persona* of coping, when I'm falling apart; or giving the impression I know what's going on when I haven't a clue; even the *persona* of being good when I'm not. Sometimes, I hide how I feel because it's better that way. But often wearing a *persona* means I keep the truth from people, because I'm not happy with what I really am. *Personae* – the variety of masks we all wear.

But, be careful about masks. Be sure you know what's *really* behind them. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a "Masque" was a form of courtly entertainment throughout Europe, with music, dancing, singing and acting. Professional actors and musicians were hired for the speaking and singing parts. The "masquers", who wore elaborate masks and didn't speak or sing, were often members of the Royal Court, and there was much intrigue and plotting that went on *behind* those masks. If all of life is a Masque, we can share entertainment and pleasure. But when the wearing of masks leads to intrigue and devious behaviour, nobody benefits.

### Prayer for today

*All knowing God, I take my mask off with you, for I can hide nothing from your gaze.  
See me, know me and love me. Help me to be "just as I am" with you. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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