

# Archbishop Smith: Masked

These days we see many people donning masks. It is what we need to do when we find ourselves in spaces where numbers of people and confines of space do not allow the physical distancing required to combat COVID-19. I have a couple of them, kindly provided by good people who know I wouldn't stand a chance of making them myself. The common use of masks is resulting in a different way of looking at one another. Our identities are partially veiled, making it difficult to recognize with certainty the other party.

In the Easter season, the Gospel accounts tell us of a different type of masking. A few times we hear of the identity of Jesus being "masked", if you will, such that those who had been very familiar with him prior to his death now are unable to recognize him. One such example is given in Sunday's Gospel passage, which recounts the Risen Lord walking along the road to Emmaus with two companions, who did not recognize him (Luke 24:13-35). The reason is that Jesus now lives in a glorified state in virtue of his Resurrection. The Lord is no longer bound by time or space, a condition unknown and hence unrecognizable to those who remain so constrained. This does not mean, however, that Jesus does not want to be recognized. On the contrary, he makes his presence known. Those two companions recognized him in the breaking of the bread. The presence of Jesus will henceforth remain "masked" under signs, visible and recognizable only to the eyes of faith.

What are those signs? From that same Gospel passage, and from others in Sacred Scripture, we know that he is wondrously and substantially present under the signs of bread and wine in the "breaking of the bread", otherwise known as the sacrament of the Eucharist. In these days when physical presence at mass is not possible, it is good to recall other ways in which the Lord is really present in sign.

He is present in his Sacred Word. Jesus is the Word of God Incarnate. Reading the Bible, then, is not leafing through lifeless pages but an encounter with the Living God. What time am I dedicating daily to meeting Jesus in his Word by reading Sacred Scripture?

He is present, as he promised, whenever two or three gather in his name (cf. Matthew 18:20). Although we cannot gather as we normally do, nevertheless the most important assembly of all remains possible: the gathering of the family. Are we deliberate about the sharing of faith among family members? Setting aside special time to pray together or to discuss questions of faith are sacred occasions in which we can encounter the Risen Lord in our midst.

Jesus is also to be met in persons who are poor, marginalized or in any way needy (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). How do we try, within the realm of what is now possible, to feed the hungry, visit the sick, reach out to the lonely, etc.?

These are privileged and blessed encounters with the Lord.

When the pandemic is over, we shall leave behind the habit of masking ourselves. The abiding presence of our Lord will, however, remain veiled. Let's develop – and keep – the habit of recognizing and encountering him where he is to be found.