

**Prepared Sermon on Sunday 2 March 2025 Epiphany 8, Year C**  
**by Fr. Paul Kumasaka**

*Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)*

During the season of the Epiphany, we have been exploring and reflecting on how God reveals himself in Jesus. In the human form of Jesus, God revealed his presence to the wise men, John the Baptist, the people who attended the wedding in Cana, the fishermen in Galilee, and so on. In today's second reading, St. Paul refers to God's revelation as 'unveiling', first in Jesus, then by the Holy Spirit. The origin of face-covering with the veil goes back to the day when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, as we read in the first reading. (Exodus 34:29-35) When Moses brought down the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved, his face shone because of God's glory. His face was so dazzling that Aaron and others became uncomfortable. The kind-hearted Moses did not want to bother them, so he covered his face when he saw them from that time on.

Haven't we experienced something similar? Not that long ago, we were forced to cover our mouths and noses with masks. Of course, this case was much more serious than just avoiding making others feel uncomfortable, as it was for preventing and protecting COVID. However, by wearing masks, we discovered that we cannot fully see others' facial expressions. Some of us might feel that the mask-wearing practice made it difficult to communicate with others.

St. Paul argues that Moses' face-veiling practice was developed from the tradition of veiling God's presence in glory from the people's eyes. Because of his Jewish religious background, Paul firmly believes that it was not God, nor Moses, but the people after him who veiled God's revelation. So, he argues that the religious leaders throughout history developed the veil of Moses in a symbolic view of their relationship with God. God was always in his house, the Temple in Jerusalem, and the religious leaders made him unmovable from there. They locked God in the Holiest of the Holy in the Temple. Therefore, ordinary people had no chance to make their encounter with God. They made God untouchable and unapproachable.

Because the tradition continued without knowing its origin and meaning, no one knew why the veil covered God's shining glory. St. Paul challenges this attitude by indicating that the leaders and teachers of religion turned the tradition of all Judaism practices into a ritualistic routine without a message.

1.

Fr. Anthony de Mello is one of my favourite writers. This Indian Jesuit explains, in a simple way, what we need for our spiritual journey. He wrote about how the tradition became a ritual without a message. He says that there was a particular guru in a monastery. He was a great cat lover and always had his favourite cat on his lap when he addressed the monks. Years had gone by, and the guru died. When his successor took place, the community rejoiced. But soon after, the monks felt something odd. They realised the new guru did not have a cat on his lap when he spoke to them. So, they asked him. 'Master, do you like cats?' He replied. 'Yes. I don't mind cats.' 'We would like to see you having a cat on your lap when you speak to us.' They said. 'Why?' the guru asked. 'Oh, because your predecessor always had his cat on his lap. And seeing that, we felt so peaceful. We wish to keep peace in our mind when we see you, so please take this cute cat.' Well, they even prepared a cat for their master. 'All right. I have this cat.

I would love to do so if it helps you live peacefully.' The guru agreed. So, the new cat sat on the lap of the latest guru whenever he addressed the disciples. Years passed, and the guru died—most of the monks who requested their master to have a cat died as well. Generations kept changing, and the life of the monastery went on. Gurus were coming and going. The community faithfully inherited the tradition and always gave the new guru a cat. There was a problem, however. Ultimately, no one could explain why the guru must have a cat on his lap. They repeated the tradition, but it became a mere ritual without meaning.

Unlike in this episode, there is a message in everything we do in our faith journey. In our reading, liturgy, prayer, and interactions with others, God gives us his message to direct us in his way and support us in our ministry. This enables us to deepen our understanding of God. Indeed, the veil never covers him from our eyes.

2.

Like all of us, St. Paul had never met Jesus. However, his dramatic conversion called him to be an apostle. He received the Holy Spirit and was empowered in Damascus. He was utterly convinced that the Lord was present with him, although he did not see him in human form. He proclaimed the living God as one who is approachable and touchable. Writing to the Church in Corinth, Paul urges them to continue their ministry in revealing the fullness of God's presence.

He also urges us to be conscious that all we do to others and to each other is to share God's loving providence with them. Then, let us ask him to take the veil from our eyes so that we may see him revealing the fullness of his love.