



## Wednesday Prayer

Reflection for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

**And Jesus said to him, "Away with you Satan!  
For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"  
Matthew 4:10**

My daughter and her family moved to New Orleans last week to start new jobs, just in time for the world-famous Mardi Gras celebration. Part of their settling in process has included embracing the parades and the family-friendly portions of this elaborate rendition of Mardi Gras. The original practice from parts of Europe included using up all fats and sweets in the home with a Shrove Tuesday party before moving into the Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Many cultures around the world have added their own flavors (literally and figuratively) to Carnival but one of the cross-cultural commonalities is the wearing of masks, from the simple to the sublime. When wearing a mask, you can behave as you want with no one knowing who you really are. You can hide from others as well as from yourself.

Perpetrators of sexual exploitation and trafficking also wear masks. Their online presence is often someone of a different age, gender, and personality than their true self. They wear a mask of caring and loving when their real intention is to draw a young person into a relationship where they can harm and exploit them. Through Cherish All Children, we educate youth about how to identify and look beneath the masks to avoid a potentially dangerous person who lurks beneath. We educate congregations on the importance of being truly caring to all young people, so they aren't drawn to the facades of the perpetrators.

We all wear masks to a degree in our daily life to hide our true selves, whether it is a facade of perfection to hide what we see as our flaws, or spending beyond our budget to appear wealthy when we're not. At the end of Mardi Gras, the masks come off and true identities are known. Lent is a time to take off our own mask and look into our hearts, to notice the unhealthy habits and desires that we have acquired that pull us away from God, turning away from them through prayer and simplicity. May your Lenten journey be a time of repentance, of turning away from earthly desires, away from Satan and towards God as Jesus did.

**God of Mercy, in this season of repentance and healing, draw us close to you and fill us with strength to turn away from earthly desires so that we might live our lives as you want us to, glorifying you and reaching out in love to others, especially those who are vulnerable to exploitation. Amen.**

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Join us each week for our [Lenten Prayer series](#), to keep children and *all* who provide support to youth in our prayers as we journey through this season of Lent.