

APRIL 5, 2022

**Genesis 35:2:** So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves.”

In Chapters 28 through 34 of the Book of Genesis, events leading up to today's scripture can be found. You might consider reading them. The following link, provided by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, presents the full text of Chapter 35: [Genesis35](#).

While I have read the bible from stem to stern several times, I didn't remember verse 2, let alone Chapter 35. However, I was struck by the notion that Jacob's admonition fits today's world. How descriptive they are of our best intentions during Lent. Our Gods are not likely to be foreign. They are worse than that. Our thoughts, feelings, and actions, along with the world's systems of thought and behavior, dominate our lives to the point where we are unaware of our birth as children of the divine Realm. Beatrice Bruteau wrote about them.

We locate our selfhood in the experiencer of pleasure and pain. This means in the first instance in our human body of flesh, and then in the emotional nature of our human personality. We believe that ‘we’ are the one who is comfortable or uncomfortable who is happy or unhappy (Bruteau, Beatrice. 1981. Prayer and Identity. Contemplative Review).

Through Christ Jesus, we experience the Divine within and without.

The great mistake many make is not recognizing that the external mask is not our true Self. Thomas Merton, in his book “New Seeds of Contemplation,” wrote

“Some call this experiencer of pleasure and pain the ego, the false self in contrast to the true Self.” Our true self is the self that happily receives freely and gladly the missions that are God's supreme gift to His sons. ... We have the choice of two identities: the external mask which seems to be real and which lives by a shadowy autonomy for the brief moment of earthly existence, and the hidden, inner person who seems to us to be nothing, but who can give himself eternally to the truth in whom he subsists. It is this inner self that is taken up into the mystery of Jesus Christ, by His love, by the Holy Spirit, so that in secret we live “in Christ” (Merton, Thomas. 1961. New Seeds of Contemplation. A New Directions Book. Kindle Edition).

How do we escape the mistake of thinking the false self is all there is? The work Bruteau focuses on is prayer, the prime mover for shaping our identities. Any experience may trigger a change in our identity, such as the death of a loved one or an unexpected opportunity to attend an online conference that is life changing. Bruteau suggests that “...in

the course of developing our prayer life we realize that we have been making certain assumptions about our identity which are not true, not deep enough, not dynamic enough, or otherwise too limited” (Ibid.).

During Lent, as we lovingly address the false assumptions we have regarding identity and our relationship with the Divine, Humanity, and the Cosmos, we can be transformed, as our hearts opens to the presence of God within, the Presence in our present.

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