

THE VEILING IN PASSIONTIDE: DRAWING CLOSER TO CALVARY

Do you notice anything different in the sanctuary or side chapels this weekend? The custom of the veiling of images during the final two weeks of Lent hails from the pre-Vatican II liturgical calendar in which the Fifth Sunday of Lent was called **Passion Sunday**. The daily Gospel readings following Passion Sunday were all taken from John and evoked the increasing tension between Jesus and the authorities that led up to Good Friday. For this reason, the period between the Fifth Sunday of Lent and Holy Week was called **Passiontide**. A remnant of this custom is the obligatory use of Preface I of the Passion of the Lord after today. It speaks of the suffering and death of Jesus and the power of the Cross revealing his judgment on the world.

In the Middle Ages, a cloth was suspended in front of the altar beginning on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. This “hunger cloth” may have been an acknowledgment that we **all are sinners** and are partaking in a “fast of the eyes.” Statues, crosses and pictures were also veiled. French Bishop William Durandus explained to his 13th century contemporaries his mystical interpretation that Jesus veiled his divinity during his passion, pointing to the Gospel of the Fifth Sunday of Lent that ended by telling us “Jesus hid and went out of the temple area” (John 8:59). Later writers posited that the veiling was to remind us of Jesus’ humiliation and to imprint the image of the crucified Christ more deeply on our hearts. In his passion, our Savior’s divinity was almost totally eclipsed, so great was his suffering. Likewise, even his humanity was obscured—recall the words of the Scripture as recounted in the 7th Station: *I am a worm and no man* (Psalm 22:6).

In 1988, the Congregation for Divine Worship issued a Circular Letter on the Easter feasts entitled *Paschale Solemnitatis*. According to this document, “It is fitting that any crosses in the church be covered with a red or purple veil, unless they have already been veiled on the Saturday before the Fifth Sunday of Lent” (n. 57). On June 14, 2001, the Latin Rite members of the USCCB approved an adaptation of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (#318) allowing for the veiling of crosses and images in this manner. The severity of the Lenten fast is increased during these last days; the whole energy of the spirit of penance is now brought out. The Stations of the Cross and images in stained glass are **never** covered, and realistically, we are unable to cover our larger statues here at the Cathedral. However, we do cover all the crosses. The crosses are unveiled after the Good Friday ceremonies, while all other images are unveiled before the Easter Vigil.

As the drama of the events leading up to our redemption unfolds, the liturgy invites us to deeper prayer and to a fuller realization of the paschal mystery. Our goal is not re-enactment, but rather a spiritual entering into the passion so that we may experience anew the mystery of Christ died and risen, even as we experience hopefully ourselves being more dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus. The remembrance of *Laetare Sunday*, just one week ago, seems distant, as all around us we see visual reminders of the impending Passion. The pre-Vatican II’s Passion Sunday is today combined with Palm Sunday in the current calendar, and its official title is “Palm Sunday of the Passion of Our Lord.” But everyone just calls it Palm Sunday!

The Church’s liturgy always teaches us. Just as our personal demeanors differ, so too the seasons of the liturgy. We now enter into a somber period, and I find great wisdom in that. While some people may be “high-energy” 24/7, most cannot maintain this level of energy each day, myself included! Still, it can be difficult to manufacture joy just because it is a Feast Day, if one’s life has hit rock bottom. Some experience great melancholy on such days. But in general, the natural rhythms of life and liturgy serve a purpose. As Bishop Peter Elliott remarks in his excellent book entitled *Celebrations of the Liturgical Year* (Ignatius Press, 2002): “The custom of veiling crosses and images ... has much to commend it in terms of religious psychology, because it helps us to concentrate on the great essentials of Christ’s work of Redemption.” Consider some extra fasting in these final days of Lent, perhaps skipping in-between meal snacks, taking smaller portions, longing more intensely for the spiritual food that lasts forever. In denying our senses of these legitimate pleasures, we dispose ourselves to long for that which is truly lasting. We also conform ourselves more closely to the Cross of Christ, giving witness of our willingness to bear our share of the burden of the Cross. Straining forward to what lies ahead, we continue our pursuit toward the goal.

An Update from Puerto Rico: I am deeply grateful for the positive feedback to my proposal to assist our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico. The **Catedral de San Juan de Bautista** is the second oldest church in the Americas, only preceded by the Cathedral in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. The following over the counter medicines are especially needed: **Tylenol, aspirin, other pain killers, flu and cough medicine, diapers and children's sneakers.** I plan to carry some items with me, while shipping others. **Collection boxes are located at St. Peter's Chapel. Donations over the next two Sundays will** ensure an on-time arrival by mid-April. I have more good news—every dollar we collect on Palm Sunday will be matched **up to \$5000** by a generous donor! Stay tuned.

- Several of you have commented to me about the endearing sight of a **long line of children** and adults attending the evening **Stations of the Cross**, walking the road to Calvary right along with the presider. Attendance has been strong. I am encouraged by the diversity both by age and ethnicity often present at our liturgies. This is a visible sign of God's family and I truly desire that people of all backgrounds will feel welcome here.
- Spanish Jesuit **Archbishop Luis Ladaria**, Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, shared that the primary aim of his ministry is the *salvation of souls*, always considered in its pastoral dimension, following the lead of the Holy Father. It is refreshing to hear this, as we never want to forget the basics. He also made a phrase of once CDF Prefect Cardinal Ratzinger his own: "we must defend the Faith of simple believers, not the Faith of theologians."
- A special word of gratitude to all priests who helped with "24 Hours for the Lord," as so many walked through these doors all day and night to receive God's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance. People arriving even at Midnight had to wait in line!
- My iPhone battery seems to be on its last gasps. I will try to avoid falling prey to the notion that a smart phone just a few years old is past its prime! The iPhone made its debut in January 2007, selling 1.3 million by year's end. No fewer than seventeen models have followed, and total sales are well over 1 billion! If I had only purchased stock...

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector