

## Rediscovering the Meaning of the Cross

Last weekend at Mass, you may have noticed that I was wearing rose vestments (or if you prefer pink). There are two days a year that these vestments are worn, the third Sunday of Advent, and the fourth Sunday of Lent. Last weekend was known as “Latare Sunday,” or “rejoice,” taken from “Isaiah 66:10, “O be joyful, Jerusalem.”

The two days mark turning points during the seasons that precede the two great feasts of Christmas and Easter, as we are to rejoice at the feasts to come.

This week, as we begin the final two weeks of Lent, we enter into a period formerly called Passiontide. One of the options during this time is to have all crucifixes and images covered in veils. This is done until the Triduum, when the statues are uncovered and the Triduum begins. (Here, we'll be doing this starting on Palm Sunday, covering the Cross for Holy Week).

Though optional, I've always liked this tradition. As for why we cover them, it's to make us think a bit of the meaning of the Cross. We are so used to seeing it we can take it for granted. Some think it dates back to Germany, when in the 9th century a large cloth was extended before the altar at the start of Lent, called the “Hungertuch,” or hunger cloth, which hid the altar from the people during Lent, and was removed during the reading of the Passion on Wednesday of Holy Week, at the words “the veil of the temple was rent in two.” It helped illiterate to the faithful how to learn about Lent. Later in the Middle Ages, the images of crosses and saints were covered at the start of the Lent; it was at about the 17th century that it was moved to “Passiontide,” the last two weeks of Lent. Now it is completely optional.

What I like about it is that it helps us to think about how we can take our faith for granted. The cross especially is something we are so used to seeing; in homes, at our school, and of course in church. It is always there. But what does it actually mean? The answer to me is that it is meant to be a way of life. We are meant to have God inform all that we do. When we look to the cross, we are reminded of how to live. The cross symbolizes Jesus' complete trust in the Father and His will.

It also symbolizes Jesus' complete love for you and for me. Our God is like the father in the prodigal son story from last weekend; always waiting for us, looking for us, embracing us when we fall, and meeting us where we are at. Sometimes we forget just how much God loves us. By covering it up, it causes us to think more deeply about it's meaning, especially when unveiled come the Easter Triduum.

The Cross also reminds us of how God confronts sin. It's also worth thinking about how we work to do that. In our own lives for instance, how do we confront what we battle and learn from our mistakes? Sometimes we cover them up or ignore them. When we confront reality, we can take steps to emerge a better person; using God's love to come up with action plans to confront the sins we may be battling. We can also go into the world and confront sin by being people of mercy and compassion, and people who are

also willing to testify to the truth to help others come to know God. From talking about challenging topics to having a sit down with a loved one who may be in a bad spiritual place, as Christians we need to unveil the reality of God's love for one another.

As the cross is covered this weekend, perhaps we can also think about how God's love is covered in our souls by sin; by our actions or inactions; or how we focus on other worldly things rather than on radiating God's love. Thinking of the Cross also challenges us to think about how we can love as Jesus loves - do we think of others and show them love in actions from our families under our own roofs to our greater human family, or do we hold back on love or have an asterisk next to the words "I love you?" Are we selfish or selfless? How do we love those who are hard to love? Loving as Jesus did, giving everything out of love and forgiving takes work. Use these final two weeks to grow by coming to Mass; celebrating the sacraments; finding time for personal prayer, and asking yourselves how can I become what it is I receive every time I come to Holy Communion and go forth from Mass as a messenger of who God is to the world?

When the veil is removed during the Triduum, maybe a deeper thing to ask is can we make sure come Easter, the veils are removed from our souls - permanently - that prevent others from seeing the love of God in us, and that prevent us from seeing how much God loves us and the response that it requires, and can we in turn do that for one another when the "veils" on their souls prevent them from seeing and realizing how much God loves them.

God bless and have a blessed week,  
Fr. Paul