

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Dear friends,

Next Sunday is the Fifth Sunday in Lent. In the older calendar it was known as “Passion Sunday”; marking a change in the Lenten Season. The last two weeks of Lent were known as “Passiontide”. It was and is a dramatic change: symbolized by the veiling of sacred images in the church.

I vividly remember entering the lobby of the High school I went to, Saint Pius X Preparatory Seminary, and seeing the large statue of Our Lady that stood there veiled in purple cloth. Everywhere one looked, purple cloth sheathed all the familiar images of Saints and Angels. Even the very Crucifix was hidden from view. I think it was and is a very visible way of reminding us of the Passion.

After a time of drastic pruning of the tree of the accumulated customs and practices of the Roman Rite; we see the Church asking us again to restore some of the “old family customs”. One of which is the ringing of bells at the elevation of the Host and Chalice at Mass. Those bells will fall silent on Holy Thursday, only to ring out again to proclaim the Resurrection. The familiar Holy Water is withdrawn from the fonts, to be replenished at Easter.

Another of these customs is this striking and dramatic covering of all the sacred images in the church. The Scriptures speak of Jesus “hiding Himself”; God “hiding His face”, and the Lord “covered up” in the tomb for 3 days. The Crucifix is unveiled on Good Friday in answer to that ancient cry of the Liturgy *Behold the wood of the Cross!* and will be the object of veneration on that day’s Solemn Liturgy.

On Holy Saturday, the great Vigil of Easter, the risen and glorified Christ is revealed to us, much like to the disciples on that early morn; as well as the statues of Our Lady and Saint Joseph.

Historians tell us that earliest drama in Western civilization is not only the ancient also the Liturgy of the Church. We are fed not only by words, but by “signs and wonders” through all our senses. Now the focus of Lent shifts from the theme of personal repentance and Death of the Lord.

Why this ancient, now restored, custom?

The veiled images symbolize a world without God. Familiar faces and images, now hidden, remind us of what the world can be; and human lives can be, without God. Nowhere to look, nothing to look at: but emptiness.

On Good Friday, the Liturgy finally returns the Crucifix to us unveiled with the cry ***Behold!...Look!***

Look at what it cost God to forgive our sins!

Look at the price of sin!

Look at the love He has for us!

Centuries ago, the great and ardent light of medieval spirituality, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, preaching on the Passion, pointed to the Crucifix, and asked "WHO did this???" He gave the answer: ***"LOVE did this!!! Heedless of His dignity!!!"***

These last two weeks of Lent are still different in our Liturgy. The theme of the Passion comes to the fore.

Dear friend, right now are forced to live in a long "Good Friday". Our church stands open, but with no Mass, no celebrations this year of Holy Week. Our whole society, indeed, perhaps even the whole world is stunned into isolation and fear over an invisible enemy in the form of the Corona Virus. Here however we seem to have no need of the symbolism mentioned above, at least this year. We are living these Passion Days together in our homes. However, Christ still lives and reigns!

Unite yourself in a Spiritual Communion with Him:

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.

If we walk with Him in these last two weeks...What an Easter we will have despite all isolation and fear.

Our Lady, Health of the Sick, pray for us!

God's blessings,

Father Hewes