

## **The Cross Presents Us With Both Ugly, Beautiful Truths: Sin and Mercy**

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.

Though optional, I've always liked this tradition. We'll be covering the crucifix behind the altar this week, along with our processional cross.

As for why we cover them, it's to make us think a bit about 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 the faithful how to learn about Lent, especially those who were not literate. Later in the Middle Ages, the images of crosses and saints were covered at the start of the Lent; it was during 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 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? I think of a few things.

One is the reality of sin in the world. And we so often as a society try to hide it.

Take, for instance, the killing of unborn children. An unborn child is referred to as a "fetus." We use "pro-choice" rather than "pro-abortion." We are told that abortion is rare. Even around town you see billboards from Planned Parenthood that say "Birth Control, it's what we do." Probably better marketing than "Killing the Unborn, it's what we Do." Recently, several people have told me about the film "Unplanned." It tells the true story of Abby Johnson, who formerly counseled people to choose abortion, and now is a pro-life speaker. She resigned from Planned Parenthood in 2009 after seeing the murder of an unborn child on an ultrasound. I have not seen the film yet but will once it is on DVD. However, have you noticed there are no ads for this film on TV? If you are on Twitter you may have seen the company mysteriously pull the film's page for a time (just a "glitch" I'm sure). This is because many media outlets rejected the ads. Yet the film has done remarkably well earning over \$6 million at the box office. That was double the amount projected. Perhaps people are in fact hungry for the truth? My hope is that the film begins to change minds and hearts as people learn about the horror of this modern holocaust that so many in society dismiss as "none of my business" or "rare." The point is whether we are talking about abortion, bullying, human trafficking, slavery, domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, so much sin in our world is covered up. We want to pretend all is well. We don't want to confront it or think about it. The Cross though makes us do just that. God came to us to show us how much we are loved, and what

we did as humans was to kill Jesus. The Cross reminds us that sin is a reality, and it must be confronted. And therein lies the other truth: how to confront sin.

The Cross shows us how it is confronted. We as humans do not sit passively by in the face of evil. We do something about it. Rather than lament a “culture of death,” people made a film called “Unplanned.” People from our own parish are going to peacefully be at Planned Parenthood in coming days in a vigil. We confront bullies and abusers. We forgive those who have wronged us. God’s love and mercy transformed a pro-abortion woman into a warrior for life. Pretty amazing isn’t it, this thing we call grace? You and I have to be people of action, not silence. When we look to the Cross, we are reminded of how far God is willing to go for us and how much we are loved. Like the Prodigal Son’s father in last week’s Gospel, who was looking and waiting for his son to return, Jesus is always looking for us to return to Him, and is there to welcome us home.

During these last two weeks of Lent, I’d invite you to again think about the meaning of the Cross in your life. Remember, Lent is meant to transform us and we emerge on Easter a better person. As the cross is covered this weekend, perhaps we can 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? Are we cowards when we see evil in our homes or in the larger world? 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.

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. Yes, sin is powerful, but far more powerful is God’s response to it - love and mercy - which we bring into the world by not sitting on the sidelines but by being active in creating a culture of life, love and mercy.

God bless,  
Fr. Paul