The Cross and the Unveiling of Love

One of the most familiar sights we see is the cross or crucifix. It is likely in your home. It's on our steeple. And, it's before us every time we enter into a Catholic Church. But how often do we stop to think about it's meaning? For it means many things - our redemption; how we are loved; how far God goes to show us how we are loved; suffering; triumph, and many more words could be used to describe it.

This week, as we begin the final two weeks of Lent, we enter into a period called "Passiontide." One of the options during this time is to have all crucifixes and statues 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; due to their size and proximity to the wall it's a bit hard to cover the statues, but we do cover our crucifix and processional cross. 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. The exact origins aren't known, though 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." 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 our faith at a deeper level, because suddenly something we are used to seeing is hidden. When looking at a cross, a key takeaway for me is that it has 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. When we see the crucifix, we should get a reminder that this is how we are to live. By covering it up, it causes us to think more deeply about it's meaning, especially when unveiled come the Easter Triduum.

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 the following:

* Do I think about how much God loves me and all He did for me?
* Is God's love is covered in our souls by sin; by our actions or inactions?
* Do I focus on other worldly things rather than on radiating God's love.?
* Can I love as Jesus loves? Do I think of others and show them love in actions from my family under my own roofs to my greater human family, or do I hold back on my love or have an asterisk next to the words "I love you?"

* Am I selfish or selfless? Loving as Jesus did, giving everything out of love and forgiving takes work. Looking at a crucifix can help when we are trying to forgive, as we think about how Jesus forgave and how we can strive to forgive one another.
* Do I show my love for God by regularly praying and going to Mass?
* Do I strive to see Jesus in others even when He can seemingly be hidden beneath a person's shortcomings?

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 too, so that we emerge on Easter having journeyed through Lent with a better perspective on what matters most and with better spiritual vision so that we keep our eyes fixed on God, rather than on the things that turn to ashes. There are so many good things in this world to enjoy, but to get to heaven, where the joy will never end, this requires a constant focus on God, and also a picking up of our own crosses daily as we follow Christ. Sometimes both God, and the reality that faith requires work, are things we can veil as life goes on. Through the Cross, though, the victory was won. Let us partake in that victory by opening our eyes and following our Lord through faith, commitment, and, most of all, love.

God bless,
Fr. Paul