

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 13, 2016

Readings: Isaiah 43: 16-21; Phil 3: 8-14; John 8: 1-11

While returning to my car after anointing someone in the hospital, I came upon a gentleman volunteering at one of the information desks. To say that he was joyous would be a gross understatement. He was literally doing a two-step in front of his desk, smiling and greeting all who came by his station. While I certainly see the value in being welcoming and joyous, it caused me to think. What if I had just visited someone who was dying? How would I have responded to the question, “And how are you doing today?”

Today, we enter more deeply into the Passion of our Lord and Savior. The remembrance of *Laetare Sunday*, just one week ago, seems eerily distant, as all around us we see visual reminders of the impending Passion. The Church’s liturgy is teaching us its own lesson. Just as our personal demeanors vary, so too do the seasons of the liturgy vary accordingly. And this is not a bad thing– in fact, it is most appropriate.

In the liturgy, we are entering into a very somber time, and there is great wisdom in that. While some may be high energy “24/7,” I do not think that most people can or even desire to maintain that level of energy day after day. Equally true, it is difficult to manufacture joy just because it is a Feast Day, especially if one’s life has hit a snag. Some experience great melancholy on such days. But in general, the natural rhythms of life and liturgy serve a purpose.

For these and other reasons, the period following the Fifth Sunday of Lent was called Passiontide. A remnant of this mini “season within a season” is found in the use of the first Preface of the Lord's Passion during the Fifth Week of Lent:

“The custom of veiling crosses and images in these last two weeks of Lent 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.”¹

This veiling of the statues and icons stems from the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John. At the end of that passage, the Jews take up stones to cast at Jesus, Who hides Himself away. That Gospel will be read this Thursday at daily Mass. The veiling also symbolizes the fact that Christ's Divinity was hidden at the time of His Passion and death, the very essence of Passiontide.

The daily Gospel readings following the 5th Sunday of Lent evoke the increasing tension between Jesus and the authorities that eventually lead up to Good Friday. The severity of our Lenten fast could be increased during these its last days because the whole energy of the spirit of penance is now brought out front.

The discipline of fasting serves a valuable purpose, not only in our lives, but also for the good of our church and even our society. There is a difference between eating until we are “full,” and until we are satisfied. And being a little hungry will not harm us in any way. Please consider some extra fasting in these final days of Lent. You might consider skipping all in-between meal eating, taking smaller portions, and longing instead more intensely for the spiritual food that lasts forever. If not with food, fast from something else such as technology, the television or your favorite music.

In denying our senses of these legitimate pleasures, we both dispose ourselves to long for that which is truly lasting and conform ourselves more closely to the Cross of Christ. We give witness that we are willing to bear our share of the burden of the Cross. Nothing shall deter us from witnessing to the truth, in season or out, for in so doing, we find our strength and our hope.

¹ Msgr. Peter Elliott, “Celebrations of the Liturgical Year,” p. 67 Ignatius Press, 2002.