



Archdiocese of Singapore - LITURGY COMMISSION

BULLETIN

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Covering of Crosses and Images in Lent.

ROME, MARCH 8, 2005 (Zenit.org).- Answered by Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University.

Q: Why are crosses and images covered during the last weeks of Lent?

A: First of all, I would first like to recommend Monsignor Peter Elliott's excellent guide "Celebrations of the Liturgical Year" published by Ignatius Press in 2002. It is a very useful resource for all those involved in the practical aspects of liturgical planning.

The duration of such veiling varies from place to place. The custom in many places is to veil from before first vespers or the vigil Mass of the Fifth Sunday of Lent while others limit this veiling from after the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.

In some places images and statues are actually removed from the church and not simply veiled, especially after Holy Thursday.

Crosses are unveiled after the Good Friday ceremonies. All other images are unveiled shortly before the Mass of the Easter Vigil.

Neither the Stations of the Cross nor stained glass windows are ever veiled.

The bishops' conference may decide if the veiling during this period should be obligatory within its territory.

The veils are usually made of lightweight purple cloth without any decoration.

The custom of veiling the images during the last two weeks of Lent hails from the former liturgical calendar in which the Passion was read on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (hence called "Passion Sunday") as well as on Palm Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week, and Good Friday.

For this reason the period following the Fifth Sunday of Lent was called Passiontide. A remnant of this custom is the obligatory use of the first Preface of the Lord's Passion during the Fifth Week of Lent.

As Monsignor Elliott remarks, "The custom of veiling crosses and images 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."

Although this is true, the historical origin of this practice lies elsewhere. It probably derives from a custom, noted in Germany from the ninth century, of extending a large cloth before the altar from the beginning of Lent.

This cloth, called the "Hungertuch" (hunger cloth), hid the altar entirely from the faithful during Lent and was not removed until during the reading of the Passion on Holy Wednesday at the words "the veil of the temple was rent in two."

Some authors say there was a practical reason for this practice insofar as the often-illiterate faithful needed a way to know it was Lent.

Others, however, maintain that it was a remnant of the ancient practice of public penance in which the penitents were ritually expelled from the church at the beginning of Lent.

After the ritual of public penance fell into disuse -- but the entire congregation symbolically entered the order of penitents by receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday -- it was no longer possible to expel them from the church. Rather, the altar or "Holy of Holies" was shielded from view until they were reconciled to God at Easter.

For analogous motives, later on in the Middle Ages, the images of crosses and saints were also covered from the start of Lent.

The rule of limiting this veiling to Passiontide came later and does not appear until the publication of the Bishops' Ceremonial of the 17th century.

After the Second Vatican Council there were moves to abolish all veiling of images, but the practice survived, although in a mitigated form.

Indulgences for the Year of the Eucharist.

From the "Newletter", Committee on the Liturgy, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Vol.XLI, Jan.2005.

Card. James F. Stafford, Major Penitentiary of the Apostolic Penitentiary, has issued a decree, dated 25 December 2004, concerning the granting of two plenary indulgences during the Year of the Eucharist for the following occasions:

* when the faithful participate attentively and piously in a sacred function or a devotional exercise undertaken in honour of the Blessed Sacrament, solemnly exposed or conserved in the tabernacle.

* when clerics, religious or others pray Evening Prayer and Night Prayer from the *Liturgy of the Hours* before the Blessed Sacrament, even when it is reserved in the tabernacle.

The decree states that the plenary indulgences are received by the faithful under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, freedom from all attachments to sin, reception of Holy Communion, prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father).

Recognizing that there are many who, because of sickness or other just cause, cannot make it to a church to venerate the Blessed Sacrament, these people can be granted a plenary indulgence if

they “make this visit to the Blessed Sacrament spiritually and with the heart’s desire... and recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding a pious invocation to Jesus in the Sacrament.

Most churches have already embarked on their plans for the Year of the Eucharist and this document provides another source of encouragement to a deepening of devotion to the Eucharist and making that devotion more vital in all communities.

In addition, the occasion of this decree gives pastors and liturgists the opportunity to emphasize the importance of the relationship of the *Liturgy of the Hours* to the celebration of the Eucharist, as described in *Laudis canticum*, the introduction to the Liturgy of the Hours:

12. *The Liturgy of the Hours extends to the different hours of the day the praise and thanksgiving, the commemoration of the mysteries of salvation, the petitions and the foretaste of heavenly glory, that are present in the Eucharistic mystery,” the centre and apex of the whole life of the Christian community”. The Liturgy of the Hours is an excellent preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist itself, for it inspires and deepens in a fitting way the dispositions necessary for the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist: faith, hope, love, devotion and the spirit of self-denial.*

Resources for the Year of the Eucharist.

A special website containing resources for the Year of the Eucharist has been developed as a part of the Committee on the Liturgy webpage of the USCCB (<http://www.usccb.org/liturgy>).

The Year of the Eucharist site includes a downloadable text of *Mane Nobiscum Domine* and other documents on the Eucharist. Resources for implementing the new *Roman Missal*, Prayers before the Blessed Sacrament and resources for adoration of the Holy Eucharist (Holy Hours, Litanies...) are also included.

The Liturgy Commission believes it is best to leave each parish and/or district to organize their own celebrations during this Year of the Eucharist, particularly Corpus Christi. There may be a diocesan celebration in October 2005 to mark the end of the Year of the Eucharist, depending on the decision of H. G. the Archbishop and the Senate.

Your comments and queries are most welcome, in writing, by fax or e-mail.

*See our web page: **www.catholic.org.sg/liturgy**.*