We are now past the half-way mark in our jounrey through Lent as we celebrated Mothering Sunday. This coming Sunday our journey begins to gather in pace as we approach Jerusalem. The last two weeks is known as “Passiontide” and to mark its difference and significance two things happen in our churches: we change our liturgical colour from Purple to Red and we also cover all statues, crosses and crucifixes. This is something which has been done for centuiries but I’m aware many of you ask me why we do this, so I thought it worthwhile to write a small piece for you.

Red is the liturgical colour we use to signify two things; the movement of the Holy Spirit (which is why we use it at Pentecost) and blood which is shed for the faith (which is why we use it for Saints who were Martyred). In Passiontide we use Red to signify Christ’s precious blood which will be shed as the story of Lent reaches its climax on Good Friday and the movement of the Holy Spirit which guides our steps in following Christ to Calvary.

And why do we cover the crosses, crucifixes and statues? There are two reasons given for how this practice was introduced.

The first dates back to the time of St Augustine. The reading on the 5th Sunday in Lent in ancient lectionary was of the story of the Jews attempting to stone Jesus. According to St Augustine, at this moment Jesus “hid himself” from the Jews, Augstine said that Christ in fact became invisible by virtue of His Divine nature. To help signify this mystery the crosses and crucifixes were covered. The same then went for images of saints, as it is befitting that if the glory of the Master is hidden, then His servants should also not appear.

The second reason given is that in Christ’s passion, Jesus’ face and body were so disfigured that Jesus was scarcely recognisable. Thus, the wounds our Lord will endure hid both his divinity and his humanity. For this reason we veil the crosses in these final days of Lent, hiding our Saviour beneath the sad purple cloth, or white linen of a shroud. Again statues of saints are then covered for if the glory of the Master is eclipsed, so His servants should not appear.

Whatever the reason, I find the practice of covering crucifixes, crosses and statues helpful in emersing ourselves fully in the story of the Passion which will unfold before us over the next two weeks. Especially once we enter into Holy Week on Palm Sunday with our processions into Town, to gather together as the followers of Christ across our Mission Area. During Holy Week there are services every day which help us to enter the story, but especially in the last three days (known as the Holy Triddum) or Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, we seek to enter more fully the story of our salvation and experience anew the redemption won for us. I encourage you to attend as many of these services, but especially all three days of the Holy Triddum which hang together as one litrugy, one narrative spanning three days that encapsulate the entirety of our Faith and will enable us to enter into the Joy of Easter morning with far more meaning for ourselves and our communities.

Wishing you a Holy and Blessed Journey through the Passion of Our Lord and Saviour,

Tad Huw.