



38. Why are Crucifixes and Statues veiled in Church at the end of Lent?

The veiling of statues and images of Christ during Passiontide, i.e. the two weeks before Easter is an ancient Catholic practice which seems puzzling at first sight. Surely, it is at this time that we ought above all to be mindful of Jesus' offering of himself for us?

The new Catholic Encyclopaedia says that it is based on part of the Gospel reading for the day in the Latin Mass: John 11v. 54: 'Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews' (because they planned to put him to death, after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. The symbols of Jesus are veiled because he hid himself at this time; also, one writer says, to remind us that his divinity was hidden during his suffering and death.

The Roman Missal provides that before the Vespers of the Saturday preceding Passion Sunday the crosses, statues and pictures of Christ and of the saints throughout the church, with the exception of the Stations of the Cross, are to be covered with a plain opaque violet veil. The crosses remain covered until the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday; the other statues remain covered until Easter Eve. The reason the statues of the saints (in our case St Mary the Virgin) should be covered is that it is improper for the servants to show themselves when the master is hidden.

Until the standardisation of Roman practice at the Counter-Reformation, practice varied widely; in some places, crosses were covered from Ash Wednesday, in others on the First Sunday of Lent. In England the custom was formerly to cover up all crucifixes, images of every kind, reliquaries and the Blessed Sacrament itself, on the first Monday in Lent. The cloths used were of white linen or silk, marked with a red cross.

Douglas Bartholomew believes the practice was introduced at St Mary's by the Reverend Frederick Newton (Vicar 1921 - 34) whose churchmanship was considerably more Anglo-Catholic than his predecessors.