

## Article, What is Laetare Sunday and Passiontide?

On *Laetare* (lay-tar-eh) Sunday — the Roman Catholic liturgy's Fourth Sunday of Lent — it's sacred ministers may optionally deviate from the "violet" to wear "rose-colored" vestments.

The day's theme comes from the entrance antiphon derived from Isaiah 66:10-11: "*Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exalt and be satisfied at her consoling breast.*" *Laetare* is the first word — meaning "Rejoice" — in the Latin text.

On Laetare Sunday (similar to the Third Sunday of Advent's *Gaudete* Sunday) the Roman Catholic Church expresses its hope and joy in the midst (or at the mid-point) of the 6-weeks of Lenten fasts and penances and precedes our entering into the somber days of *Passiontide* \*. This change in color helps to indicate for us, a forward looking glimpse of the joy that awaits us at Easter.

(\**Passiontide* is a name given for the last two weeks of Lent, beginning on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. The second week of Passiontide is Holy Week. For centuries now, the Fifth Sunday of Lent marked the beginning of a special sub-season of Lent, called *Passiontide*, which extended up until Holy Saturday. During this time, the Church's liturgy becomes much more somber and a sorrowful mood and atmosphere is reflected in the various practices that occur during the liturgical events.



The most obvious example of a more somber mood is the veiling of statues and images, which remains a practice in the current *Roman Missal*. In a *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts* from the Congregation for Divine Worship (#57, Feb 20, 1988), it states: "(Holy Thursday) After Mass, the altar should be stripped. It is fitting that any crosses in the church be covered with a purple veil, unless they have already been veiled on the Saturday before the fifth Sunday of Lent [the Sunday preceding Palm Sunday]."

Why? In his dolorous Passion, Jesus' face and whole body were so disfigured by the blows and scourges from the Roman soldiers, that Our Lord was scarcely recognizable. Thus, the wounds Our Lord endured, tended to hide both of his natures: Divinity and Humanity.

Covering crosses, statues and images or "veiling" with unadorned violet opaque cloths begins on the Saturday before the 5th Sunday of Lent.

Being keenly aware of traditions and customs within the Roman Catholic Church aids us in understanding and celebrating the beauty of our Roman Catholic faith.

As you can see, there is much associated with even a nondescript day like the Fourth Sunday of Lent — not to mention the rest of the season, or the 50 days of Easter and beyond.