

# Catholic Review Column: The Forty Days of Lent and the Fifty Days of Easter

Lent is over. Holy Week has been celebrated. Easter Sunday has been observed. Now what?

For many the tendency will be to return to business as usual. Lenten penances and charitable practices will be put on the shelf, just the way we put away Christmas decorations. The memory of Holy Week and Easter will fade. Back at work, involved with our families and friends, dealing with our problems as well as our usual sins and failings – well, we may wonder what difference this most sacred time of year has made in us.

Just when we start thinking like that, we need to take a second look. It is not for nothing that the Church, having observed forty days of Lent proceeds to observe fifty days of Easter. Throughout the Easter Season, the Church shows us how the Lord continued to instruct and form his Apostles after the Resurrection. He appeared to them on the road to Emmaus so that they would come to recognize them in the Breaking of Bread, that is, the Eucharist. He granted Peter and by extension the other Apostles the power to forgive sin. He elicited from Peter a three-fold confession of love and told him three times, “tend my sheep”. The Risen Lord instructed them to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit in whose light they would understand all that he taught them and in whose power they would fulfill the mission he entrusted to them.

If the disciples needed further formation after the Resurrection, the same is true of us. For the catechumens who were baptized at the Easter Vigil and for the candidates who were received into the Church, these fifty days are a time of “mystagogy”. That’s not exactly a household word but here is what it means. Those newly initiated into the life of the Church, having received the Holy Spirit, are now in a position to understand even more deeply the mysteries of the life of Christ by which they were redeemed. Their eyes of faith are opened even wider so that they

can see how the saving events in the life of Christ are carried over into the sacramental life of the Church. As they are formed more deeply in the faith, they are to become even more committed to live as disciples of the Lord in the community of the Church.

“Well and good for the catechumens, but we already know those things!” we might be tempted to think. But to that, I have to say, “Not so fast!” I am keenly aware of my own need for ongoing formation as a follower of Christ and I hope you feel that way too. I think of the young people I had the privilege of walking with on Palm Sunday eve, stopping for a holy hour, praying the Rosary, attending a concert, and celebrating the Palm Sunday liturgy at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. How urgent it is for the Church to continue reaching out to our young people and inviting them to share in the Church’s life. I think of the Chrism Mass when I joined my brother priests in renewing the promises made on ordination day. How we need to be renewed in our priesthood not just once a year but every day. I think of many confessions that were heard throughout the Archdiocese in Lent – how necessary that all of us continue to seek forgiveness for our sins so as to lead lives of virtue and charity; this is not just a Lenten activity but something we should do all the time. I think of the many people who came to Mass on Easter Sunday who don’t come to Church for the rest of the year, except perhaps at Christmas. Can we really be content to return to business as usual?

In his Easter Vigil homily Pope Francis spoke of how God surprises us. Surely the Risen Son of God surprised the Apostles when he appeared to them in the Upper Room and on the seashore. During these fifty days of Easter, let us allow the Risen Lord to visit our hearts, to surprise us with joy by deepening in us His Risen Life, that newness of life for which we prepared during the forty days of Lent.