

Why we skip the Alleluia during Lent

For the entire season of Lent the Church has banished the use of the word Alleluia from its public liturgies (e.g., Mass). Alleluia (Halleluja as spelt in older uses of English) is a Hebrew word that means, literally, "Praise to God." This praise has a joyful overtone to it and we use it especially during happy celebrations. And while we do praise God all year round, during Lent we withhold a bit of our joy and happiness because of the season's penitential and sorrowful character. After all, we are anticipating Jesus' very passion and death.

Throughout the year, before the proclamation of the gospel we sing an Alleluia. We sing our joy because Jesus Christ gave us the gospels, the Word of God, containing his good news—our instruction manual for salvation. But during Lent, we dial-down that quality. And while we still praise God before the Gospel, we reserve the word Alleluia, the highest form of praise, for happier times.

Of course, Easter Sunday has arrived and it is indeed a happier time. Not only has Jesus' passion and death passed, but he has also been resurrected. And it is through this resurrection that we can be assured of salvation, of everlasting life. So how do we express our joy? Not only do we bring the Alleluia back, we bring it back in triples. For the entire Easter octave (Easter lasts 8 full days from Easter Sunday through the following Sunday), at the end of Mass, we sing a very special, Alleluia—3 times.

We tend to take the word Alleluia for granted. We hear it so often that it tends to lose its meaning. This is why the Church removes its use for the 40 days of Lent. By removing it, we miss it. And when we miss it, we tend to long for it. And we long for it, when it comes back we rejoice—bringing its significance back into full force. Listen for it! And rejoice. Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

By Fr. Corwin Low, O.P.