

A Coffee with Alessio



Welcome to Lent 2018!

Here we are again at the Season of Lent. We enter into that time of the year when we do our best to declutter our lives of everything that isn't so important. As I write this column, there are a couple of things that come to mind. Firstly, Ash Wednesday this week was on the same day as Valentine's Day. Secondly, I think too often we view Lent as a punishment or a chore, when it should be viewed in a positive light!

It may seem an oxymoron that Valentine's Day falls on the same day as Ash Wednesday. This year is not the first time this has happened. Just as there have been times when Chinese New Year (which we celebrate today) has fallen on Ash Wednesday too. The Church in its wisdom has issued suggested guidelines to follow so that we fulfil our Church obligations as well as our cultural responsibilities. Since during this season of Lent, we are supposed to undertake works of prayer, penance and fasting and we are meant to do these works with love and charity, it seems to me in a rather strange way it is a good thing that Ash Wednesday should fall on the same day as Valentine's Day. You see since Valentine's Day is about love, we should see Christ's love for us mirrored by the love of husband and wife or those on the journey towards marriage. Love requires a lot of giving and taking, it is the same during Lent. We try to put God and neighbour before ourselves. Every relationship requires giving and taking and the Lord and our neighbour are no different. When we get to Good Friday, we see the ultimate sacrificial love Jesus has for us. So, for those of you who celebrated Valentine's Day, I hope that you celebrated the sacrificial love you have for each other as well as everything else that comes on that day.

Coming to my second point about the works of prayer, fasting and penance. Going without something isn't always the easiest thing to do. Yet, it can be a total liberation! As I write this column, I can't help but be reminded by the end of year clean up I did both at school and at home at the end of last year. We accumulate so many things during the year, that by the time the end of the year comes we have no room left for anything else. I still have piles to put in the recycle bin, but I am nearing the end of that tidy-up. In this way, I have made space for new things and, I am able to find other things I am looking for much more readily. Lent is the same as the clean-up. By not being tied down to having to have more things, and by giving of our time to God and neighbour, we are able to focus on what is really important in our life. If we undertake these works with a sincere heart, then Lent will truly be a time of personal and communal freedom.

I mentioned in last week's column about the settings of the Gospel Acclamation for Lent. There are several settings in *Catholic Worship Book II*- #27e and #54-61 and as *As One Voice 1* #75 and #196 to name a few. As I mentioned last week, choose one setting and use it throughout Lent and Holy Week (including the weekday Masses).

I hope you got to enjoy some delicious pancakes on Tuesday this week. I finished all my sweet delights and now I will take those up again at Eastertime. In the meantime, I hope this Lenten season is a very fruitful and prayerful time for you and allows you to discover new possibilities through the works of prayer, penance and fasting that you undertake.

Enjoy your coffee!

Alessio Loiacono
Music Field Officer

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