

A Coffee with Alessio



Welcome to Lent 2020

This past Wednesday being Ash Wednesday marked for us the beginning of Lent. Our Lenten journey began with ashes being placed on our foreheads and this journey will culminate with Holy Week and end with the joy of Christ rising from the dead on Easter Sunday. In last year's "Welcome to Lent" column, I wrote about the changes that we would notice in our liturgy as we made the change from Ordinary Time to Lent.

In my Lenten columns last year, I focused on the Stations of the Cross. I am going to do that again this year beginning next week.

For this week though I would like to offer another short reflection on the Season of Lent. Lent is like a pilgrimage and we began that pilgrimage with the Ashes being placed on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. We can think of our Lenten pilgrimage as an intense 40-day retreat focused on the heart of the Christian vocation and mission - conversion to Jesus Christ and the deepening of our friendship with him.

Actually, in the early Church when the followers of Jesus were not known as Christians, but instead followers of "The Way", if they were going to join the Church community for its ritual (in someone's home), they would make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead outside a window hole. By making the Sign of the Cross on their forehead they were indicating to those people in that house that they were a follower of Jesus, and not a Roman authority coming to arrest and persecute them. Also, the fact that they called themselves the followers of "The Way", gives us an insight that they saw their earthly lives as a pilgrimage to follow the Lord.

Yes, we are embarking on a pilgrimage for the next six weeks - a time to convert back to the Lord, by actively seeking him in our prayer, fasting and almsgiving. I don't know about you, but some weeks with all that goes on it is hard to get time to think and process things. In the silence is where we can think and in the silence is where can best talk and listen to the Lord. Just as he went into the desert for forty days and forty nights, so too do we go into this desert and have our liturgy stripped bare as I've mentioned before. We go into this time with a sense of grittiness. After all, those ashes are gritty. Our lives too are marked by grittiness - everything is not smooth sailing. As we embark on this grittiness, with the absence of flowers, solo instrumental music, no Alleluia and, as I've suggested before, no recessional hymn during Lent, let's use this time to actually think about the texts of our Lenten hymns and use these changes to assist us in our prayer and fasting, so that when we come to Easter, we will truly feel a sense of smoothness and joy in our liturgy. Whenever

something or someone is missing we long for that thing or person to return. We will only be able to truly celebrate Easter with joy and welcome back the Alleluia if Lent has been a time of conversion and finding the Lord through our works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

The Gospel stories we will hear each Sunday during Lent will present a sense of grittiness to us:

- Jesus fasting for forty days and nights
- the Transfiguration
- the Samaritan woman at the well
- the blind man having his sight restored
- the death and revival of Lazarus.

Each of these stories will resolve themselves in the way that Jesus wanted. So, let us pray for the courage to discern His will for us this Lent. They are also a reminder to us that he walked on the earth like one of us. He knows the full gamut of our human emotions. God could have come down to earth in a hot air balloon in 1990. Instead, he chose to become one of us (two thousand years ago) and came into the world the same way we do - out of a mother's womb. He did that because he is the humblest and most perfect of beings and since he knows what we go through, he wanted to get his "hands dirty" and get right in there in the grittiness of our lives.

Back to the idea of pilgrimage. The Stations of the Cross are like a pilgrimage. That's why the ministers of the liturgy move around from one station to another. They don't stand still. Those fourteen steps were his final pilgrimage before his death on the Cross. May we include those same steps as part of our Lenten pilgrimage. Next week's column will begin where I finished last year at the Seventh Station - Jesus falling for the second time.

I mentioned in last week's column that "Ashes" was an appropriate hymn for Ash Wednesday. It would also be appropriate to repeat that hymn this Sunday. Another hymn which will work well with the readings this Lent (Year A) is "Bring us back to you, O Lord our God (CWB #627; CWBII #287).

So, as we continue another Lenten journey, may we truly be open to being "brought back to the Lord" through all that we do for God and our neighbour, especially in our liturgical music ministry, so that on Easter Sunday we will know that we experienced a wonderful pilgrimage because we gave the Lord our all during Lent.

A coffee at Muffin Break seems a good place to go before heading into the liturgy this first Sunday of Lent.

Enjoy your coffee!

Alessio Loiacono
Music Field Officer

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Parts of this week's column are taken from a homily given by Father Conor Steadman on Ash Wednesday 2018. They are reproduced with kind permission and gratitude.