

A Fresh Look at LENT 2017

The Gospel of Ash Wednesday – Matthew 6.1-6.16-18 – sets the tone for the season of Lent. It offers us a trio of ideas – Almsgiving, Praying and Fasting. However, we're asked to do them **in secret**. How can we integrate this call to be charitable, to pray and to fast, in private, into our celebration of Lent this year? Here are some ways to support each other through the public weekly (or daily) celebration of the Eucharist while holding on to our privacy, our secret room?

PRIVATE

'Giving a dig out' (Almsgiving)

As people enter the church on the First Sunday of Lent (or on Ash Wednesday) they



are invited to take a card on which there are three suggestions for practical charitable activity during the week. One card could have the following choices for example:

- (a) Write a letter to support those working with people who are homeless,
- (b) Help reduce climate change by recycling more of your waste
- (c) Support Friends of the Elderly by a contribution or volunteer.

Encourage people to choose the action to which they feel drawn to and try to do it before the next Sunday – remember how long fingers can become. They put a tick beside the task done and on the following Sunday, keeping their card close to your chest, place it in the basket with their usual contribution. The baskets sit before the altar as a silent offering. At the end of Mass people can take on another task as they leave the Church when the cards are 'recycled'. It's a private way of 'giving a dig out' with community support.

'Taking time out with God' (Praying)

Many people find it difficult to put aside time for prayer. Sixty seconds of quiet would be a good start, from time to time, during the day. The Angelus Bell on RTÉ might trigger this quiet time or a gentle alarm on the mobile phone, like a prayer gong, to signal the beginning and end of this moment. Now one else needs to know.



This practice could be reinforced at the Eucharist by having one minute of **announced** complete silence after the homily and similarly before the Prayer after Communion. Once people know that someone hasn't fallen asleep or that it's not a mistake they will get into the rhythm of the silence. Peace will reign.

Another challenge for Lent is the writing of more direct intercessions within the 140 character framework of Twitter for example:

Let us pray for those who are fasting today because they have no food: that we will reach out to them with our support and practical help. Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer (140)



Using the same Twitter pattern ask people to anonymously send in their own prayers. While four intentions might only be spoken aloud at the Sunday liturgy all are kept in a prayer box in front of the Lectern. This practice of writing down prayers in a concise way will help the flow of the celebration and avoid 'sermonettes' or general prayers from a book. It is also a physical way of handing our petition over to God.

'Doing Without' (Fasting)

One of the aids to fasting during Lent is the psychological support of centuries of tradition and the company of others as we do without sugar, salt or whatever. How can we fast today in secret?

What about fasting from making judgements about ourselves or others.

– by letting go of that unkind thought, buttoning the lip and holding the tongue. If we can keep it up for one day and build on that during Lent it could change our lives.

**NON-JUDGEMENT
DAY IS NEAR**

Here is also a sample Penitential Rite that could be helpful with a focus on the endless mercy and compassion of God.

You call us to heal and to forgive without judgement
You invite us to share tirelessly in your work of mercy
You show us boundless compassion

The sending out after Mass might be - Go in peace with compassion in your hearts and your minds. If we hear it often enough it might become second nature to us.

Music Ideas

The Servant Song (Richard Gillard), My Soul Give Praise (Ciaran Coll – **Emmanuel 2017**) Be Still And Know (Anonymous), Jesus All For Jesus (Atkinson/Mark – **Em. 2017**) Kyrie (Taizé), Lux Mundi (Trevor Thomson – **Em. 2017**)

THOSE THREE SUNDAYS

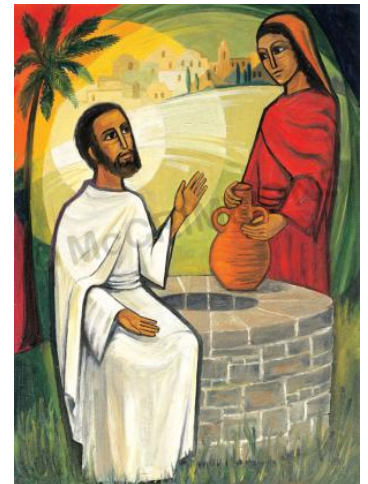
Lent is the season during which the Elect - those who will be initiated into the Christian Community at Easter - prepare more intensely for this important event. From the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent they move through the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. ' This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance' (RCIA 126).

Public celebrations take place for the **Scrutinies** (3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent) and the **Presentations** of the Creed (3rd Week of Lent) and the Lord's Prayer (5th Week of Lent) usually in the context of the celebration of the Eucharist, after the Homily. These rites enrich both the lives of the catechumens and the community into which they will be initiated. Even if there is no one for initiation it is possible to draw out for the community some precious ideas for reflection inspired by the Gospel of each of the three Sundays and the Scrutinies/Presentations.

3rd Sunday of Lent - 'If only you knew what God is offering'.

The Gospel (John 4:5-42) tells the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. Among the many rich phrases is the following - 'If only you knew what God is offering'. If we spend time with this short extract it can become for us an invitation to explore our relationship with Jesus, the source of nourishment, renewal and healing. An Intercession for the Elect from the 1st Scrutiny could be adapted for all.

That, like the woman of Samaria, we may review our lives before Christ and acknowledge our sins, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)



This Sunday could mark the beginning of a journey to the fountain of healing - the Parish Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation - that would take place ideally before Holy Week. An announcement is made or flyer passed out or tweet sent. The Presentation of the Creed to the Elect takes place during the following week. For those who are not journeying with individuals in their own community, the Sunday Creed could be broken into three sections using the musical refrain Credo, Credo, Credo. Amen (music by Jean-Paul Lécot).

Ronan McDonagh's 'Song of the soul that is glad to know God' from his Centenary Mass of St. John of the Cross (1991) is very fitting for this celebration. The text by Pamela Stotter has this refrain:

*I will give you living water, no more shall you thirst
I will give you living water springing up within you.*

(see also Wondrous Encounters – Scripture for Lent by Richard Rohr)

4th Sunday of Lent - I only know that I was blind and now I can see

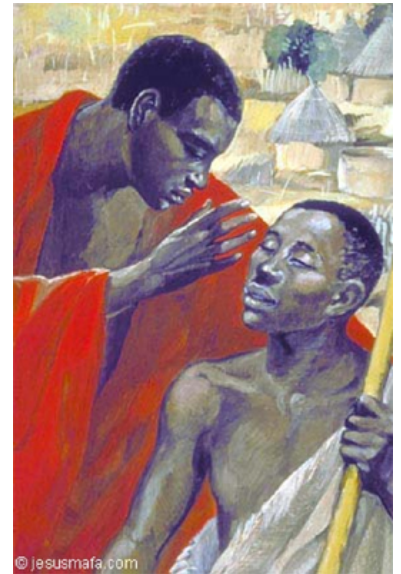
We are offered another healing encounter in the Gospel story of Jesus and the man born blind (John 9:1-41). There are many verses that would lead to reflection – try this one and see where it leads you. - I only know that I was blind and now I can see. The song *Amazing Grace* (Spiritual) comes to mind as does *Open My Eyes* (Jesse Manibusan). They are linked to the core Gospel message.

An Intercession for the Elect from the 2nd Scrutiny could be adapted for all.

That God may dispel darkness and be the light that shines in the hearts of all,
let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)

An adaptation of the Prayer of Exorcism would be useful:

That God may free us from the false values that surround and blind us and set us firmly as children of the light forever, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer.
(>140)



Jesus was a great storyteller – what do you think of this one from Ramadan 2016?

GAZA CITY, Gaza - The month of Ramadan in Gaza is seen as a time of unity where neighbours come together regardless of religion or class.

The renewed sense of community is clear for all to see, with people going out of their way to help one another. But few can speak of a bond as close as that of Kamal Tarazi, a 55-year-old Christian and his blind neighbour, 45-year-old Hatem Khries. During the holy month, Tarazi has taken Khries to the al-Burno mosque five times a day, every day, so that the blind man can pray. Tarazi then waits for the prayers to finish so that he can take his neighbour safely home. The first prayer is at dawn and the last one after dusk, but Tarazi says he does not mind the gruelling routine.

“We are never separated - everyone knows I am Christian and he is a Muslim and they are amazed at how deep our friendship is,” he added. The bond has grown so close that even throughout the rest of the year, Tarazi goes to the mosque with Khries on Friday, and Khries goes to church with Tarazi on Sundays.

Tarazi takes his friend shopping so that he does not miss out on walking the same old streets of al-Zawya market where he used to walk before the accident in which he lost his sight. It is here that Khries says the smell of the spices and the sounds of stall-holders and shoppers helps to bring the hustle and bustle of Gaza to life even if he can no longer see it happening around him.

5th Sunday of Lent 'I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'

The Gospel for this Sunday (John 11:1-45) brings us into the world of the particular friends of Jesus – Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Sit with this passage and see where it might lead you. Jesus in this story pours out his humanity in the tears he weeps for the death of his friend. His presence evokes a profession of faith in the resurrection of the dead from Martha. This Sunday might be a day to be sensitive to those who are bereaved and acknowledge them in the intercessions. This passage is about resurrection and also about freedom – 'Unbind him, let him go free'. We can make a link again with the celebration of the Parish Penitential Service and that call to freedom from what chains us down at the moment – another tweet.

An Intercession for the Elect from the 3rd Scrutiny could be adapted for all.

That we may be freed from sin and grow in the holiness that leads to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)

An adaptation of the Prayer of Exorcism would be useful:

That God may free us from the power of the spirit of evil, so that we may bear witness to our life in the risen Christ which we renew at Easter. let us pray to the Lord: Lord, hear our prayer. (>140)

There is a sung version of this Gospel by David Haas with a lively refrain that builds up throughout:

'Take the stone away, come out, come out. Take the stone away, come out.'

It can be very powerful and can also be used also even if the Gospel text is recited.

In the 5th Week, the Elect are presented with the Lord's Prayer. This Sunday it might be sung by all on one note so as not to exclude anyone or actions may accompany it or sign language if it is appropriate. Encourage people to listen and be aware of each other so as to recite the prayer in unison (community v individualism)

Conclusion

Notice the progression in the selected passages over the three Sundays – 'If only you **knew**... I only **know**... I **know**.' Observe the journey from possibility, through doubt to certainty. If this can be picked up artistically by way of image or on a slide it might be a seed planted.



Reflection on the raising of Lazarus

Let us go back to the graveside and stand near the 12 apostles, and let us watch carefully for ourselves. As Jesus approaches the tomb, Martha puts in a word of caution, “**Lord, by now he will smell, this is the fourth day.**” (John 11:39). At the tomb Christ calls out with a loud voice, “**Lazarus, come out**”. It had to be a loud voice, because Christ was calling beyond the grave. We strain our necks, and look inside. There he is, wriggling in the shroud.

“**Unbind him**”. A neighbour goes into the tomb and unties him. Lazarus sits up, he does not know where he is. He yawns, rubs his eyes, is helped to his feet, and staggers out into the light. He is barely out of the tomb, when two women are hanging round his neck, crying, this time for joy.

When the confusion and commotion dies down, Martha and Mary take him home from the graveyard. He is still a bit wobbly in the legs. This is no ordinary funeral. It is not every day that the meal after the funeral is attended by the dead man, back from the grave. Inside the house I would love to ask Lazarus a few questions, but there is no chance with the crowd pushing and shoving. I would to ask him, “were you in heaven?” “Are you glad or sad to be back?” “What is it like beyond the grave?” However we must move on. As we leave Lazarus, Martha and Mary, the celebrations go on all night.

Death, transition, rebirth are around us everywhere in nature. Autumn is a season of dying. Winter, the season of death. Spring, the season of new life, rising out of the graves of Winter. For pre-Christian Ireland, nature in the form of the “**Cailleach**”, or old woman, was supposed to die in Winter. But she was born again in Spring as the “**babóg**” in the form of a child. This echoes our own Christian belief of death and resurrection. Death for all of us is a rite of passage from time to eternity.

Like the trees or the flowers we too carry a seed, a Divine seed. One day the old garment of the flesh will wear out, wither and die, and go back to earth, like the fallen leaves in Autumn time. But the soul, the seed of God in all of us, will move on to the next phase. It will cross the grave and will flower in the Spring time fields of heaven,if....if.... we have earned the rite of passage.

The Euro or credit card won't cross the grave. Did you ever see people putting a cheque book or credit card into a coffin? Beyond the grave we need a new currency, a heavenly bank account. Let God be our Banker, and let us top up our heavenly account every day, so that when death comes we will have earned the rite of passage.

We began with the words of Christ to Lazarus, “come out;” “untie him”; “let him go free”; let us finish with them. May we too, one day, hear these words from God: “**come out**” from the tomb of time; from the darkness of the grave.

“**untie them**” from the fetters of death; from the bandages of pain and illness.

“**let them go free**” from the chains of human frailty; from the rags of the flesh.

To these words may God add two more words: “**welcome home.**”

©– Fr Tim Carroll SMA, Emeritus Vicar Apostolic of Kontagora, Nigeria

THREE MORE THOUGHTS

The highpoint of the church's year is the Sacred Triduum – that three day event culminating in the Easter Vigil which has become fragmented over the years. Some people are Holy Thursday people who love the Mass of the Lord's Supper while others are firmly rooted in Good Friday. Only the hardy annuals with stamina make Holy Saturday their special day. Few now follow the ancient pattern fully and complete the cycle of those three days of the life death and resurrection of Jesus. How can we integrate the spiritual trios of Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting and Those Three Sundays on the journey to Initiation and Renewal into our great celebration?

One of the important elements of the Mass of the Lord's Supper is the Washing of Feet and the call to serve others in the name of Christ. Invite those who took up the challenge to give a 'dig out' to this celebration. Quietly from their places in a commentary before the washing of feet invite them to see themselves in the role of the one with the towel and basin and give thanks for the grace they received from their selflessness.

Encourage the 'doing without' people to the celebration of the Lord's Passion where they can unite their fasting with the suffering of Christ and renew their commitment to a life of 'non-judgement'. Highlight the judgement moments in the Passion of John.

The silence of Holy Saturday might be the place for those who made prayer their special act for Lent to take an hour away from Easter distractions simply to 'be'.

The 'Three Sundays' will culminate in the Easter Vigil Celebration if there candidates for Initiation. However, for all present that night who opened themselves to the power of those iconic Gospels they will see in a new way the Blessing of Easter Water, The Paschal Fire and the Lighting of the Candle with the joyful Alleluias to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. On Easter Sunday morning that new insight will dawn on them with the Sprinkling of the New Water, the renewal of Baptism Promises and the lighting of candles and the beginning of seven weeks of endless exuberant Alleluias.

Music Suggestions from Emmanuel and Laudate School Music Programmes 2017

Mass of the Lord's Supper: *A New Commandment* (Ephrem Feeley) and *Ubi Caritas* (Taizé) – Laudate 2017.

Solemn Celebration of the Passion: *Above All* (Le Blanc/Baloché) and *Jesus All For Jesus* (Atkinson/Mark) from Emmanuel 2017.

Easter Vigil and Easter Season: *Jesus Is Risen* (Arr. Gonzalo Gonzalez) from Emmanuel 2017 and *Shout For Joy* (John Casey) from Laudate 2017.

