

Sunday and Feast Day Liturgical Notes for Priests and Deacons

Suggestions for Leading Worship



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RE: Liturgical Suggestions for the Fourth Sunday of Lent – Cycle B

Sunday or Feast Day date: March 21-22, 2009

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

An Overview for this Sunday...

This Sunday is traditionally known as “*Laetare* Sunday.” Virgil Michel gives us one insight into the meaning of this Sunday of Lent:

A Christian Lent can never be entirely sad. With the fourth Sunday the pent up spiritual joy in the true member of Christ bursts forth in anticipation of the Easter Joy to come. ‘Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and come together all you that love her; rejoice with joy, you that have been in sorrow’ (Introit) – a note re-echoed in the gradual and the offertory. The melody of the introit also is significantly that of the first Easter Alleluia. This is the day when the catechumens were decked with roses and when roses were mutually exchanged. Hence comes the custom of the rose vestment. (from *the Liturgy of the Church*, Virgil Michel, OSB. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1937)

Another view (which reflects the light imagery so prominent in the Cycle A readings) comes from Alexander Schmemmann:

Bright sadness is the true message and gift of Lent. Little by little we begin to understand, or rather to feel, that the sadness of Lent is indeed “bright,” that a mysterious transformation is about to take place in us. It is as if we were reaching a place to which

the noises and the fuss of life, of the street, of all that which usually fills our days and even nights, have no access – a place where they have no power. All that which seemed so tremendously important to us as to fill our mind, that state of anxiety which has virtually become our second nature, disappear somewhere and we begin to feel free, light and happy. It is not the noisy and superficial happiness which comes and goes twenty times a day and is so fragile and fugitive; it is a deep happiness which comes not from a single and particular reason but from our soul having, in the words of Dostyevsky, touched “another world.” And that which it has touched is made up of the light and peace and joy, of an inexpressible trust. (from *Great Lent*, Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1969)

As last week, there is a choice in *Lectionary* readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Cycle A Readings should be used at the Mass where the Second Scrutiny is celebrated. Cycle A readings which feature the Gospel of the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-41) are integral to the Second Scrutiny (see RCIA nos. 164-170). The readings and prayers of the Second Scrutiny bring out the image of light as a symbol of enlightenment and knowledge, and “seeing” as a symbol of realization and acceptance.

The Cycle B Gospel and readings set forth the tensions of Christian life in a series of contrasts: believe/not believe, light/darkness, live in truth/do evil works. One path leads to salvation, the other to condemnation. We can believe, walk in the light and live in truth because God has loved us and sent His Son that we might not perish but have eternal life. Today’s Gospel begins to move us toward the Triduum with the reference to Jesus’ being “lifted up.” The reference is not only to death on a cross but – more importantly – to His being lifted up in glory. (from *Living Liturgy 2006*, J. A. Zimmerman, *et al.*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press)

Reflection Questions...

- 1) What “contrast” in the life and ministry of Christ most speaks to your heart at this moment?
- 2) What “contrasts” in your own life and ministry give rise to the biggest struggles within your spirit at this time at this moment?
- 3) What do you need to “lift up” to the Lord in special prayer at this time already, in order for your Easter celebration truly to be a holy and wonderfully inspiring moment?

Some Other Considerations as You Prepare...

- 1) Continue the Lenten pattern you have set for the Introductory Rites.
- 2) The First Opening Prayer for the Fourth Sunday of Lent speaks of the continuity of Lent with the celebration of Easter; the Alternate Opening Prayer speaks of our growing in love and following the example of Christ’s love in accepting suffering and death.
- 3) Remember that at the Scrutiny Mass there is an option to use the Ritual Mass for the Scrutinies (p. 826 in the Catholic Book edition of the *Sacramentary*)
- 4) The Second Scrutiny may be found in the RCIA at nos. 164-170. The texts in the Scrutiny provide two models of Intercessions for the Elect.
- 5) The Preface for the Fourth Sunday of Lent P 15 is required to be used when Cycle A Readings are proclaimed, but not in other cycles. If Cycle B readings are proclaimed use Preface I or II of Lent, P8 or P9. Or consider using one of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, each of which has its own proper Preface.

Sample Intercessions for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

(adapted from *Prayers for Sundays and Seasons, Year B*. Scagnelli, Chicago, LTP, 1997)

Reflecting Cycle B Readings:

Priest: Let us offer our intercessions to our God, who is rich in mercy.

Deacon (or other reader if there is no deacon):

1. That the Church, the household of God, may be built up by the challenge of prophetic voices and the fidelity of God's people, we pray to the Lord.
2. That God, who so loved the world that he gave His only Son, may banish deeds of darkness from our society by the light of truth, we pray to the Lord.
3. That lands made desolate by war and refugees driven from their homes by conflict may come to a Sabbath of healing and a season of peace, we pray to the lord.
4. That God's healing power may work through medical personnel who dedicate themselves to the physical and emotional wholeness of others, we pray to the Lord.
5. That we who are saved by faith may live as children of light, rich in good works as our way of life in Christ, we pray to the lord.
6. That the dead (especially _____) may be raised up and seated with Christ in glory, we pray to the Lord.

Priest: God of mercy, who sent your Son into the world
not to condemn it, but to save it.
Open our eyes to behold Jesus lifted up on the cross
and to see in those outstretched arms your abundant compassion.
Let the world's weary and wounded come to know
that by your gracious gift, we are saved and delivered,
so immeasurable is the love with which you love the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sample Intercessions for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

(adapted from *Prayers for Sundays and Seasons, Year B*. Scagnelli, Chicago, LTP, 1997)

Reflecting Cycle A Readings:

Priest: In the presence of God, whose light shines on us in Christ, let us pray now for the needs of all.

Deacon (or other reader if there is no deacon):

1. That the Church may scatter earth's darkness with the Light of Christ, by preaching the just word and practicing what we preach, we pray to the Lord.
2. That lands made desolate by war and people driven from their homes by conflict or disaster may come to a Sabbath of healing and a season of peace, we pray to the Lord.
3. That those preparing for baptism may be enlightened, revealing God's mighty works through their witness, we pray to the Lord.
4. That our Lenten observance may wake us from sleep and fill us with light bringing forth all that is good and right and true, we pray to the Lord.
5. That the dead (especially _____) may be raised up with Christ, we pray to the Lord.

Priest: O God, the author and source of all light,
You gaze into the depths of our inmost hearts.
Never permit the powers of darkness to hold your people captive,
but open our eyes by the grace of your Spirit, that we may be able
to look on your Son
and see the One you sent to illumine the world,
so that, seeing, we may believe and worship Jesus as the Lord
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.
Amen.