

Understanding the Mass: The Alleluia, Gospel Acclamation, and the Sequence

In his book, “The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Mass,” Lawrence Johnson gives a historical survey of the Alleluia, Gospel Acclamation, and of the Sequence used in the Roman Liturgy. He writes, “The Hebrew ‘Halleluyah’ (rendered in Latin and Greek as ‘Alleluia’) means praise YHWH (the Hebrew letters for the divine name never pronounced in Judaism out of profound respect for holiness) or ‘Praise the Lord.’”¹ In addition, Johnson comments that, “the only occurrence of the Alleluia in the New Testament appears in the book of Revelation (19:1-9 where it forms part of the victory hymn sung by the redeemed in heaven.”² The author of the Book of Revelation writes,

After this I heard what sounded like the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying: “Alleluia! Salvation, glory, and might belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her harlotry. He has avenged on her the

*They said a second
her forever and ever.”
living creatures fell*



blood of his servants.”

*time: “Alleluia! Smoke will rise from
The twenty-four elders and the four
down and worshiped God who sat on*

the throne, saying, “Amen. Alleluia.” A voice coming from the throne said: “Praise our God, all you his servants, [and] you who revere him, small and great.” Then I heard something like the sound of a great multitude or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder, as they said: “Alleluia! The Lord has established his reign, [our] God, the almighty. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready. She was allowed to wear a bright, clean linen garment.” (The linen represents the righteous deeds of the holy ones.) Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These words are true; they come from God” (Revelation 19:1-9).

The Alleluia in a sense could be replaced with “praise the Lord.”

¹ The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Mass, Johnson, FDLC 2011 Pg. 38

² Ibid Pg. 38

In addition, Johnson adds,

The introduction to the Alleluia into the liturgy in the west posed an initial problem as to the occasion of its use. According to St. Augustine (354-430) it was sung every Sunday, but in fifth-century Rome, where it was perhaps introduced under eastern influence, it was sung only on Easter. Roman practice eventually extended its use to the whole Paschal season, and then throughout the liturgical year except in Lent. The acclamation was linked to the Gospel (yet its verse was not necessarily taken from the Gospel) and often accompanied the procession with the Gospel book.³

Today the “Alleluia” is used in the Paschal season, Ordinary Time, Advent, and in the Christmas season, but not in the Lenten season proper. Instead, “Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory” is acclaimed in Lent, anticipating the Resurrection of Jesus and his speaking to us in the Gospel, where we then, in the other seasons, stand up shouting Alleluia, anticipating the risen Lord about to speak to us in the Gospel.



³ Ibid Pg. 38

The Sequence

Historically, the Sequence “is obligatory on Easter and Pentecost; it may be used on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Lord and the optional Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows.”⁴ Much theology and prayer are expressed in the sequences. For example the Easter Sequence reads;

*Christians, to the Paschal Victim
Offer your thankful praises!
A Lamb the sheep redeems;
Christ, who only is sinless,
Reconciles sinners to the Father.
Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous:
The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.
Speak, Mary, declaring
What you saw, wayfaring.
“The tomb of Christ, who is living,
The glory of Jesus’ resurrection;
bright angels attesting,
The shroud and napkin resting.
Yes, Christ my hope is arisen;
to Galilee he goes before you.”
Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining.
Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!
Amen. Alleluia.*

⁴ Ibid Pg. 38

The Easter Sequence is sung before the Gospel Acclamation on Easter Sunday.

The Pentecost Sequence reads;

*Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!*

*Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
Come, within our bosoms shine.*

*You, of comforters the best;
You, the soul's most welcome guest;
Sweet refreshment here below;*

*In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.*

*O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of yours,
And our inmost being fill!*

*Where you are not, we have naught,
Nothing good in deed or thought,
Nothing free from taint of ill.*

*Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour your dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away:*

*Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.*

*On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend;*

*Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end. Amen.
Alleluia.*

Ultimately, The Alleluia, the Gospel Acclamation, and the Easter Sequence, point to the center of our faith, which is the Paschal Mystery. The Paschal Mystery can be summed up, but is not limited to the life of Jesus, meaning, his Incarnation and all the teachings through his words and deeds, indeed fulfilling the Hebrew Scriptures; his Death and Resurrection for the forgiveness of sins; his glorious Ascension unlocking for us the gates of heaven, and the promise of eternal life; and his breathing into us his Holy Spirit as Church. For this reason we give thanks and praise to God. Amen. Alleluia.

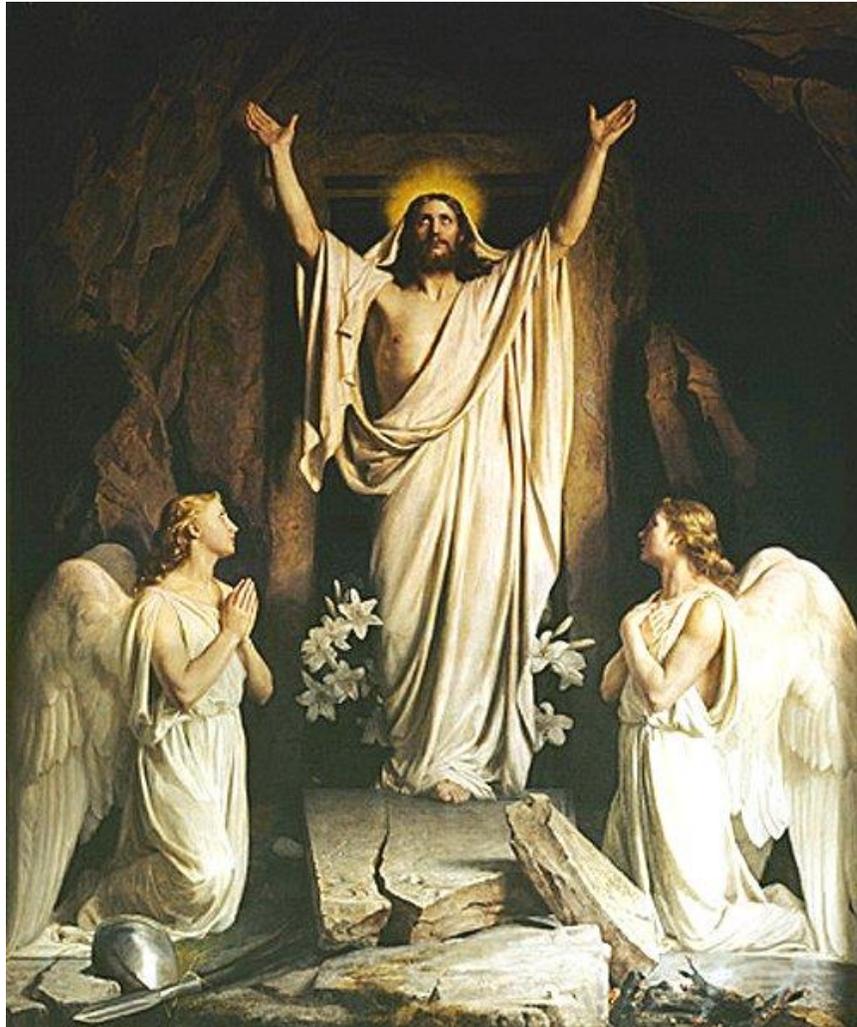


Photo Sources

1. The Resurrection Pg. 4

[http://cyberhymnal.org/img/r/e/s/The%20Resurrection,%20by%20Carl%20Heinrich%20Bloch%20\(1834-1890\).jpg](http://cyberhymnal.org/img/r/e/s/The%20Resurrection,%20by%20Carl%20Heinrich%20Bloch%20(1834-1890).jpg)

The Heavenly Host Worshipping Pg. 1

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Empty Tomb Pg. 2

<http://torahresourceblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Resurrection.jpg>