

Night Prayer with Burial of the Alleluia

JOIN US ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17TH AT 6 P.M. IN THE CHURCH



The Burial of the Alleluia is an ancient custom observed each year.

On the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, we bid this sacred word a fond farewell for the duration of Lent.

We will sing and recite Alleluia again at the Easter Vigil after the 40 days of Lent, when we hear the Church proclaim the Resurrection of Our Lord. The deacon approaches the priest with the words, “I announce to you a great joy: it is the Alleluia.”

During Night Prayer this Tuesday, a placard with the “Alleluia” in ornate, gold letters is “buried”—placed under the funeral pall. Alleluia is the Latinized form of Hebrew’s Hallelujah (i.e., “Praise the Lord”). In the West, we associate Alleluia with the joy of the Resurrection and Easter. And so, the Church buries the Alleluia while the rest of us put on ashes to demonstrate our penance.

Historically, Pope Alexander II decreed that the dismissal of the Alleluia to be solemnly marked on the eve of Septuagesima Sunday (i.e., three Sundays before Ash Wednesday) in the chanting of the Divine Office by inserting Alleluias into the sacred text. This custom also inspired the creation of new

hymns sung at Vespers honoring the Alleluia. The best known of these hymns is Alleluia, dulce carmen (i.e., “Alleluia, Song of Gladness”), composed by an unknown author of the tenth century. “Alleluia, song of gladness, voice of joy that cannot die.”

This burial of the Alleluia was nicknamed the deposition (i.e., “the giving on deposit”). Curiously enough, gravestones in Catholic cemeteries traditionally had the inscription Depositus, or simply “D” to indicate a Christian’s burial. When the term indicates the burial of the Alleluia or of the faithful departed, the Christian belief in resurrection is clear.

As we bury those who have been “marked with the sign of faith,” and as we enter into the fasting of Lent, we do not silence our tongues because of despair or permanent loss. Rather, we do so with confidence that what has been deposited into the earth—our dead, our Alleluia—will rise again. ☥