



Liturgical Notes on Lent & Holy Week
Prepared by the Bishop's Liturgical Advisory Panel
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These notes are the second in a series of “evergreen” documents that have been prepared by the Bishop's Liturgical Advisory Panel. As the liturgical year unfolds, the panel will offer notes on each of these groups of seasons: 1) Advent, Christmas and Epiphany; 2) Lent and Holy Week; 3) Eastertide and Pentecost; 4) Sundays after Pentecost (including Creation Season). In subsequent years the notes will be revised and expanded. The notes are approved by our Bishop, and intended to assist parish clergy by providing guidelines and encouraging creativity as we mark time as a diocesan church.

LENT

Each year parishes observe Lent by adapting the normal pattern of Sunday worship to reflect the unique tone of the season. This tone is informed by a number of different elements: the weekly readings and prayers, parish custom, the presence of candidates for baptism, and Christian tradition.

The weekly readings are primary among the elements that create a unique tone to Lent. Each week sets forth themes to influence the choice of eucharistic prayers, musical selections and visual symbols as well as inform the sermon. Presiders do well to read ahead to review the seasonal emphases. See the Appendix below for a helpful summary of themes for each Sunday in all three years of the Lenten lectionary.

The use of purple hangings and vestments, while not required, is a customary practice in most parishes. Some parishes veil church ornaments during Lent. Digital images and church banners can display a variety of Lenten symbols, including but not limited to the cross. Consider selecting a variety of images rather than use the same ones year after year. Close attention to the lectionary will provide abundant inspiration.

Some parishes have a custom of not displaying flowers in the church during Lent. If your parish does display flowers, be cautious about trying to introduce a ban during Lent. Given the significance memorial flowers have for families who donate or bring them, the effort might not be welcomed. If flowers during Lent is the parish custom, clergy can describe them as symbols of our communion with the faithful departed, rather than mere decoration. If necessary, caution against the use of ‘Easter’ flowers in Lent, particularly lilies, in order to distinguish one season from another.

Ashes

It is important to emphasize and practice the custom of receiving ashes within a corporate liturgy so it does not become construed as a personal act of devotion with sacramental overtones.

During the pandemic, the practice of ‘ashes to go’ or ‘drive-by’ imposition became more widespread than previously. While this practice is not desirable outside of lockdown conditions, there are appropriate ways of making the imposition of ashes available to people who are not able to attend a mid-day or evening liturgy. For example, some parishes will choose to remain open on Ash Wednesday for times when people can come to receive the imposition of ashes from a priest. Consider adapting the Book of Alternative Services (BAS) rite to create a brief liturgy for use at this time.

Gathering of the Community

In Lent the penitential rite on page 216 of the BAS is appropriate, or the page 185 liturgy can be used. In either case, the ‘Glory to God’ is omitted; either the Trisagion or the Kyrie can be used in its place.

In 2019 General Synod authorized ‘Gathering Rites for the Paschal Cycle’ with two new options for Lent: <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Gathering-Rites-for-the-Paschal-Cycle.pdf>. Both highlight the centrality of baptism. The suggestions for posture are optional.

In Option 1, a different question arising from the baptismal covenant is recalled each week throughout Lent, followed by the choice of one of two prayers of corporate confession. In Option 2, the recollection of all the questions of the baptismal covenant, each followed by a congregational response, serve as the act of confession. When using either option, the confession and absolution is omitted after the Prayers of the People.

The intention is that each option be followed in Eastertide by the corresponding Easter Gathering Rite, both of which offer thanksgiving for baptism.

Proper Prayers, Eucharistic Prayers & Prayers of the People

A deep familiarity with the weekly lections helps the presider decide whether to select a Collect of the Day from the Alternative Collects: <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Alternative-RCL-Collects-Final-2019.pdf>. There are two alternative choices for each week, with the Scripture passages carefully noted for easy reference.

The BAS provides six eucharistic prayers, including Eucharistic Prayer #3 which has two Lenten prefaces. In addition, there are three Supplementary Eucharistic Prayers that can be found <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Eucharist.pdf>. Again, the lections of the week are the best guide for the presider when selecting which of the nine eucharistic prayers to use on any given Sunday. Consider using a Eucharistic Prayer for Sundays in Lent that is not used at other times of the year, in order to further distinguish the Lenten season.

The Prayers of the People can reflect different Scriptural themes throughout Lent, while still keeping a recognizable pattern throughout the season. The BAS provides two litanies particularly appropriate for Lent, on page 117 and page 121. Additional litanies can be created using short cue phrases and responses including: ‘In trust, we pray. **Have mercy on us**’ and ‘In confidence, we pray. **Be merciful, O God**’.

Encourage intercessors to use relatively short petitions at the start of the litany, so a rhythm of cue phrase and response can be established, rather than overly complex phrases that can confuse the congregation.

Hymns and Other Musical Selections

Rather than being limited to what is found in the ‘Lent’ section of a hymnal, look to the lectionary for themes to highlight each week. Although it is not a substitute for a thorough familiarity with the readings, a useful summary of themes found throughout the Sunday lectionary in Lent can be found in the Appendix.

Avoiding the use of ‘Alleluia’ in Lent and Holy Week - either sung or said - is customary.

What About Passiontide?

Curiously, the observance of a two-week period called ‘Passiontide’ is presented in *McCausland’s Order of Divine Service*, even though neither the BCP nor BAS mention such a season. In contrast, the five Sundays in Lent are part of a unified season that leads to Holy Week when the celebration of the Passion begins. Simply letting the themes of the lectionary ‘speak’ assures that the richness of the season will unfold week by week.

As *McCauslands* itself indicates in its explanatory ‘General Remarks on using the Ordo for the BAS’, the resource should be used selectively, guided by a familiarity with the essays, explanatory notes and rubrics of the *BAS* as well as an understanding of Anglican liturgy as a whole.

HOLY WEEK & THE TRIDUUM (THE GREAT THREE DAYS)

The Sunday of the Passion with the Liturgy of the Palms

Some parishes have a set of red hangings and/or vestments appropriate for this Sunday, distinct from red hangings and/or vestments with Pentecost symbols.

The liturgy for this Sunday remembers both the joy of the palms and the solemnity of the Passion. It is essential that the reading of the Passion be included in the liturgy on this Sunday. You may wish to conclude the Passion reading where Jesus is led away to be crucified (i.e. Mt 27.31; Mk 15.20; Lk 23.32), understanding that the full Passion narrative is read on Good Friday. Remember that the term ‘the Jews’ in the Passion is best replaced by ‘the people’ or ‘the Judeans’.

A dramatic or choral reading of the Passion is not a substitute for a homily. Listeners need to hear a theological and pastoral response to the Passion of Christ and its meaning in the life of Christians and the church.

Proper Prayers, Eucharistic Prayers & Prayers of the People

As mentioned above, General Synod has authorized Alternative Collects in addition to those provided in the BAS. These include options for the Palm Procession and the eucharist on Passion Sunday, as well as each day in Holy Week and the Easter Vigil.

Eucharistic Prayer #3 has two Holy Week prefaces to choose from. On page 306, the BAS notes that Eucharist Prayers 1, 3 and 6 are appropriate for Maundy Thursday, suggesting revisions to the institution narrative for each prayer.

The litany on page 117 of the BAS is appropriate for use during Holy Week as well as litanies specifically created for the season. Note the comments above regarding the appropriate use of cue phrases and responses.

Maundy Thursday

Long custom has held that there is only one liturgy on Maundy Thursday. Either white or red hangings and vestments are appropriate. The former emphasizes the institution of the eucharist while the latter highlights the unity of Holy Week.

There is no designated substitute for ritual foot-washing, such as hand-washing, shoe polishing or the anointing of hands. It is better to avoid the ritual altogether than to do any of these (placing a pitcher of water with a bowl and towel in a visible location can be an effective allusion to foot-washing—especially if the towel and water are dirty). That said, do not offer foot-washing unless the eucharist is also celebrated.

Many parishes strip the altar at the end of the liturgy, while Matthew 26:30-46 and Psalm 22 are read. It is fitting for clergy to briefly leave the sanctuary in order to remove vestments. Care should be taken to store any consecrated elements reverently after the aumbry is emptied. While the stripping of the altar can be a moving experience, it is not desirable for it to be advertised by the parish; the celebration of the eucharist and (if offered) the washing of feet are the central features of the liturgy. Remember there is no dismissal as this service is part of the single liturgy that is the Triduum.

Years of interfaith discussions with Jewish partners has made it clear that seder suppers done by Christians are an offensive practice, not only during Holy Week but at any time.

Good Friday

It is appropriate for the clergy and server(s) to wear an alb or cassock.

There is no greeting on this day as the service is a continuation from the evening before. A silent entrance precedes the words, “All we like sheep have gone astray.”

When selecting hymns ensure they reflect the movement of the liturgy from penitence for human sin and a solemn recollection of the crucifixion to the glory of the cross. A hymn like ‘O sacred Head, surrounded’, quite appropriate early in the service, will sit uneasily near the end. A hymn such as ‘We sing the praise of him who died’ better reflects the life-giving nature of Jesus’ death and proclaims the Christian understanding of the cross as victory.

If the Passion from St. John’s Gospel is read in narrative form, care should be taken not to put the congregation in the position of demanding the death of Jesus. Two or more individuals may be asked to say those lines. Parishes can consider adding an occasional choral refrain such as, ‘We glory in the cross of our Saviour Jesus Christ’ in order to avoid the sense that the death of Jesus is regrettable. A clear cue phrase would be needed.

As already stated, remember that the term ‘the Jews’ in the Passion is best replaced by ‘the people’ or ‘the Judeans’.

Parishes are encouraged to include a Meditation on the Cross as outlined on pages 311-317 in the BAS. A cross may be placed in a central position where all can approach it if desired. This is a time of corporate meditation. A complex musical offering without sung congregational participation is less desirable than hymns or simple chants that the congregation can sing.

Some parishes offer communion from the reserved sacrament on Good Friday. See above for the reverent storage of consecrated bread and wine.

Devotional Rites versus Liturgy

Be careful not to let devotional practices undermine Holy Week liturgies. Stations of the Cross, Tenebrae and choral oratories can be meaningful expressions of personal piety but do not replace the Church’s liturgy.

Holy Saturday

Parishes might consider offering a contemplative Morning Prayer on Holy Saturday.

The Easter Vigil

This liturgy can be beautiful and meaningful, but ought not to be seen as mandatory, and years of repeated effort by a community is often necessary before a Vigil can live up to its full potential. Consider joining in with one or more parishes in order to create a critical mass of people in attendance. Attending as a parish group can nurture connections within that parish as well as adding to the experience of the host parish.

Whenever possible, schedule the Vigil after sunset. The reality of literal darkness makes the symbol of the Easter fire more vivid.

Scheduling adult baptism(s) and/or confirmation can add a depth of meaning to the Vigil. Careful preparation will be needed if scheduling the baptism of infants from families new to the parish. The Vigil can be experienced as an ‘insider’ rite that makes visitors feel like outsiders so be sure to make newcomers feel welcomed and involved.

Appendix: Sunday Lectionary during Lent

“The centre of apostolic Christianity is Crucifixion-Resurrection, not Crucifixion alone or Resurrection alone, nor even Crucifixion as the prelude and Resurrection as the finale, but the blending of the two...for life-through-death is the principle of Jesus’ whole life: it is the inward essence of the Christians; and it is the unveiling of the glory of the eternal God.” Michael Ramsey, The Resurrection of Christ, pp. 20-21.

Lent directs the Church to penitence and self-denial, Christian initiation, and the Lord’s Passion. The readings show this orientation.

Year A’s first reading is generally a figure or type of baptism and is linked to similar themes in the fourth gospel. Year B readings include a series of covenants from the Old Testament which are paired with Christ’s teaching and preparation for his Passion. In Year C, the first readings treat of water and nourishment while the gospel texts proclaim implications of following Christ as well as his teaching about his death’s significance. The psalm is, as ever, a comment and response to the first reading.

Even with a direct correlation between the first reading and the gospel - a different principle of organisation than the semi-continuous schema of readings in ordinary time - the epistle is less directly linked. It might be said to “float” above the other readings, possibly providing some interpretive notes, but showing that the readings as a whole with all their richness, can never be reduced to a single, didactic theme.

Year A

1 st in Lent	Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7	Psalm 32	Romans 5:12-19	Matthew 4:1-11	Disobedience of Adam & Eve; obedience of Jesus
2 nd in Lent	Genesis 12:1-4a	Psalm 121	Romans 4:1-5, 13-17	John 3:1-17	God promises to make a great nation of Abraham; Jesus & Nicodemus - birth from above
3 rd in Lent	Exodus 17:1-17	Psalm 95	Romans 5:1-11	John 4:5-42	Moses & water from the rock at Horeb; Jesus & the Samaritan woman at the well
4 th in Lent	1 Samuel 16:1-13	Psalm 23	Ephesians 5:8-14	John 9:1-41	“[Mortals] look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart; Jesus heals the man born blind - sight & insight
5 th in Lent	Ezekiel 37:1-14	Psalm 130	Romans 8:6-11	John 11:1-45	Vision of the valley of the dry bones; raising of Lazarus

Year B

1 st in Lent	Genesis 9:8-17	Psalm 25:1-9	1 Peter 3:18-22	Mark 1:9-15	Covenant with Noah; temptations of Christ
2 nd in Lent	Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16	Psalm 22:22-30	Romans 4:13-25	Mark 8:31-38	Covenant with Abraham; take up the cross & follow
3 rd in Lent	Exodus 20:1-17	Psalm 19	1 Corinthians 1:18-25	John 2:13-22	Covenant on Sinai, ten commandments; Jesus cleanses Temple & speaks of the temple of his body
4 th in Lent	Numbers 21:4-9	Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22	Ephesians 2:1-10	John 3:14-21	Moses raises up serpent of bronze; the lifting up of the Son of Man
5 th in Lent	Jeremiah 31:31-34	Psalm 51:1-13 or Psalm 119:9-16	Hebrews 5:5-10	John 12:20-33	The law will be written on people's hearts; grain of wheat dies to bear fruit

Year C

1 st in Lent	Deuteronomy 26:1-11	Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16	Romans 10:8b-13	Luke 4:1-13	Celebrate the bounty God has given; temptations of Christ
2 nd in Lent	Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18	Psalm 27	Philippians 3:17-4:1	Luke 13:31-35	Covenant with Abram; Jesus weeps for Jerusalem
3 rd in Lent	Isaiah 55:1-9	Psalm 63:1-8	1 Corinthians 10:1-13	Luke 13:1-9	Let all who thirst come to the waters; parable of the fig tree
4 th in Lent	Joshua 5:9-12	Psalm 32	2 Corinthians 5:16-21	Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32	Passover at Gilgal, the manna ceases; the prodigal son
5 th in Lent	Isaiah 43:16-21	Psalm 126	Philippians 3:4b-14	John 12:1-8	I give water in the wilderness; Mary anoints Jesus

Weekday celebrations of the Eucharist during Lent

These readings show the same themes of penitence and self-denial, Christian initiation, and the Lord's Passion as the Sunday readings. From Ash Wednesday to the end of the second week of Lent, the first theme dominates (e.g., the repentance of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah; Daniel's confession of Israel's sins; parable of the sheep and goats; the prodigal son).

The second theme emerges strongly after the third Sunday in Lent. There are readings such as the healing of Naaman; Ezekiel's vision of the stream of water from the temple.

With the fifth week, the Lord's Passion comes to the fore. There is the reading about the fiery serpents in Numbers 21, and gospel readings taken from chapters 8, 10, and 11 of John.