



The Meaning of the Alleluia

The Alleluia is the Greek and Latin form of the Hebrew word *Hallelujah*, and it means "praise Yahweh" or "praise the Lord." Traditionally, it has been seen as the chief term of praise of the choirs of angels, as they worship around the throne of God in Heaven. It is, therefore, a term of great joy, and our use of the Alleluia during Mass is a way of participating in the angels' worship. It is also a reminder that the Kingdom of Heaven is already established on earth, in the form of the Church, and that our participation in Mass is a participation in Heaven.

The Omitting of the Alleluia

Throughout the liturgical year, the Catholic Church makes certain changes to the Mass to reflect the liturgical season. Next to the change in the color of the priest's vestments, the absence of the Alleluia during Lent is probably the most obvious. During Lent, our focus is on the Kingdom coming, not on the Kingdom having come. We no longer sing with the choirs of angels; instead, we acknowledge our sins and practice repentance so that one day we may again have the privilege of worshiping God as the angels do. The association of *alleluia* with Easter led to the custom of intentionally omitting it from the liturgy during the season of Lent, a kind of verbal fast which has the effect, not of depressing the mood of the liturgy, but of creating a sense of anticipation and even greater joy when the familiar word of praise returns. Indeed, when the *alleluia* does return, it is with an incredible flourish.

Burying the Alleluia

The custom arose of "burying the *alleluia*" before Lent begins as a reminder that we do not use it at all during the forty days of Lent. We do not use it at church. We do not use it at home. We let it rest, as it were, during Lent, so that when it reappears on Easter, we may hear it afresh. In fact, once it returns on Easter, we give it no rest at all, repeating it again and again, in celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus. There are various ways to "bury the *alleluia*." Here is one that combines this custom with a popular Easter custom. The *Alleluia* Egg is designed to help us bury the *alleluia* during Lent and to put *alleluia* in our midst during Easter. The *Alleluia* egg should be a plastic egg that can be opened. Then the word *alleluia* is written in relatively large, legible letters on a piece of paper and put inside the egg. It may be written once, or many times. You will also need a container of some sort to hold the egg while it is "buried". A small box or a bag are suitable containers. On Easter Day, when you come home from church, gather around the burial place. Bring out the container, open it, and remove the Alleluia Egg. As you do, sing "Jesus Christ is risen today". Shout alleluias. Let it help you praise the Lord that Jesus is alive

The Return of the Alleluia at Easter

That day comes triumphal on Easter Sunday—or, rather, at the Easter Vigil, on Holy Saturday night, when the priest chants a triple Alleluia in an exceptionally elaborate tone before he proclaims the Gospel, and everyone present responds with a triple Alleluia. It is a moment of unrestrained fervor as a singer intones the elaborate *alleluia*, and the congregation sings it back. The cantor raises the pitch and sings the *alleluia* a second time, and again the congregation echoes it back. Once more, the cantor raises the pitch, and the congregation responds. And then the good news is proclaimed that Christ is risen from the dead. The dramatic effect of the return of the *alleluia* is heightened considerably by the fact that no *alleluias* have been heard since Lent began. The Lord is risen; the Kingdom has come; our joy is complete; and, in concert with the angels and saints, we greet the risen Lord with shouts of "Alleluia!"