

Observing Lent

A Lenten Carol Service

Most people think of "Carols" as going with "Christmas". However a carol is simply a popular seasonal song, often using a dance rhythm which gives it an instant appeal. A range of carols exists: Advent Carols reflect on the prophecies and look forward to the messiah's coming, or reflect on his second coming. There is a body of Easter Carols, some of which are well known even in New Zealand, e.g. "This Joyful Eastertide." And there also exists a smaller and perhaps lesser known body of Carols for Lent and Passiontide. (Refer to the Oxford Book of Carols as a source.)

The beginning of the season of Lent could well be marked, on the evening of the first Sunday in Lent, by a ceremony of Readings, Carols and Hymns appropriate to the season, which would set the tone for the Parish focus throughout the following weeks.

St Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin, has held such a service for the last 25 years.

The format of the service is:

- Processional Hymn
- Opening Prayer
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (especially appropriate in this "Year of the Eucharist")
- Readings with appropriate Carols and Hymns as the Congregational response, finishing with:
 - the Gospel, proclaimed by the Celebrant
 - the Lenten Responsory, recited or sung while kneeling. (This is found in Evening Prayer for Lent. It can be sung effectively to any 2 section chant, unaccompanied)
- Prayers of Intercession (from the Breviary for Evening Prayer) followed by
- The Lord's Prayer (which can be sung if you have a good tune)
- Benediction of the Blessed sacrament is then given in the traditional form, followed by
- Dismissal and Recessional Hymn if desired

A small group of singers is required to perform the Carols which would be unfamiliar to most of the congregation. A judicious use of Lent and Passiontide hymns ensures that all are included in the singing. These could include:

When I Survey The Wondrous Cross
Glory Be To Jesus
Praise To The Holiest In the Height (including the Passiontide verses which are nearly always omitted)
Soul of My Saviour
Lift High The Cross (selected verses)
Check your hymnal's seasonal Index for other hymns suitable for Lent.

The parish Liturgy planning / preparation group will choose the readings which should be appropriate to the musical resources used. The following list is drawn from readings we have used at St Joseph's over the years:

Genesis 3: 1-15 The Fall, and the promise of a Redeemer
Exodus 3: 1-8, 13-15 God promises to deliver His people
Jeremiah 31: 31-34 The promise of a new covenant and the forgiveness of sins
Isaiah 58: 1-12 True fasting: to care for the poor and oppressed
Phillippians 2: 6-11 Our lives must be

modelled on Christ Jesus
The Gospel: Matthew 6 1-6, 16-18 Your Father who sees in secret, will reward you.

After each reading, (except the Gospel), there follows at St Joseph's Cathedral a Choir response in the form of a carol, and a Congregational response in the form of a hymn. This pattern could be modified to suit the resources of the individual parish. A selection of the choir/carol responses over the years, is as follows:

Reading 1 The Holly and the Ivy. This is more of a Lenten Carol than a Christmas Carol! (Read: The holly bears a berry as red as any blood... a prickle as sharp as any thorn... a bark as bitter as any gall) We omit the verse which sings of "Christmas Day in the morn"

OR - Come All You Worthy Christian Folk (one of the "Job" tunes, also known as Dives and Lazarus!)

Reading 2 A chant setting of Psalm 50, "The Miserere", with Congregational response: "Be merciful O Lord for we have sinned."

During the singing of this psalm by

the choir or cantor, some liturgical action could take place such as the sprinkling of the people with holy water or even the imposition of ashes, kept from Ash Wednesday. Some liturgists argue that the Ashes should be reserved for Ash Wednesday solely; however this duplication could be judged as pastorally appropriate, especially in areas where parishioners are impeded by work demands or distances from attending Ash Wednesday Masses.

In either case, the Holy Water/ Ashes could be placed to the side of the Sanctuary area on a prominent stand, elegantly swathed in purple cloth.

Reading 3 This Is Our Accepted Time, This is Our Salvation. (Piae Cantiones, 1582) The text is appended at the end of this article. It sings along beautifully to the tune of Good King Wenceslas" (also a Piae Cantiones tune.) The source of the translation is unknown; the doxology is my own. Feel free to use this if it appeals.

OR - Remember, O Thou Man." (Ravenscroft's Melismata 1611)

Reading 4 Now Quit Your Care (Angevin Carol) This was originally

"White Lent", but later had "Christmas" words fitted to the delightful tune.

Reading 5 A simple chant setting of the Lenten Canticle for Evening Prayer which repeats the content of the reading -

OR "Gabriel's Message Does Away" (Piae Cantiones 1582) in which the text has the echoes of the Easter "Victimae Paschali Laudes."

If the parish has a choir which likes to sing Motets, then the following can be fitted in at appropriate places:

None Other Lamb (words: C Rosetti; Music Christopher Norton)
Subdue Us By Thy Goodness (J S Bach)
Hide Not Thy Face From Us, O Lord (R Farrnat)
Sicut Cervus (Palestrina)
To give but a few examples.

If the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place within the ceremony, then a Taize chant such as "Jesus Remember Me When You Come Into Your Kingdom" works very well during the actual exposition at the beginning. "Down In Adoration Falling" should be sung as customary

before the blessing. (Please us the grand Gregorian tune!) A Carol or organ music can cover the interval whilst the priest replaces the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle prior to the recessional hymn. (Maybe your congregation remembers "Adoremus In Aeternum")

If the Blessed Sacrament is not exposed, then the ceremony would conclude with the final prayer, from the Breviary for Vespers, Solemn Blessing and Dismissal, after the Prayers of Intercession.

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This Is Our Accepted Time
Piae Cantiones 1582

This is our accepted time, this is our salvation,
Prayer and fasting are our hope, penance our vocation.
God of pardon and of love, Mercy past all measure
You alone can grant us peace, You our holy treasure.

Lord look down upon us all, look upon our yearning.
We are dust and unto dust we shall be returning.
Lift us up, O Lord of Life; flesh has brought us sadness,
Hear our plea, bestow on us everlasting gladness.

Praise the father, bless His name, Lord of all creation.
Praise the Son, Who from Him came, bringing our salvation.
Praise the Spirit by Them sent, Breath of all Perfection;
Leading us in love through Lent to our resurrection!