



Ask Fr James,

Why do we suspend the singing of ALLELUIA during Lent?

Etymologically, the word "Alleluia" derives from the Hebrew words: *Hallel* (praise) and *Yahweh* (God). Thus, *hallelu yah* or (H)Alleluia means "Praise the Lord." Alleluia is the song of praise of the choirs of angels as they worship around the throne of God in Heaven (*See Revelations 4; 5:11-12; 7:11;8:3-4 and Hebrews 1:14*). At our Masses, at the chant of alleluia, heaven is torn open and we are incorporated with their great chorus of praise in heaven. The rhythm of this heavenly hymn begins our link-up with the heavenly liturgy where we the faithful join the heavenly hosts in singing the Lord's praises. In this liturgy, there is perfect glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity.

The omission of the alleluia during Lent is one solemn way to enter into the spirit of the season of Lent. The days of Lent are days of penance and recollection and also days of anticipation of the greatest thing God did for which we rejoice and praise God - the Resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ from the dead. This is why the Alleluia is suspended until the Easter Vigil, on Holy Saturday night, when the priest chants a triple Alleluia before he reads the Gospel, and everyone present responds with a triple Alleluia. The singing of praise God (Alleluia) ushers in the joyful celebration that the Lord is risen; the Kingdom has come; our joy is complete; and, in chorus with the angels and saints, we greet the risen Lord with shouts of "Alleluia!" Our singing of the Alleluia during Mass; it is a way of participating in the angels' worship and our exit from the spiritual desert that we have been since the 40 days of Lent. We emerge refreshed, singing alleluia.

The Lenten period is a reminder that we are journeying to experiencing the resurrection of the Lord and we live in the hope of the resurrection. In addition to not singing or saying the Alleluia before Gospel, we are also asked to deprive ourselves of certain liturgical practices during Lent, such as instrumental music with no singing; singing or saying the Gloria; excessive decorations around the altar and veiling crosses and statues after Palm Sunday; so as to create a longing for the resurrection of Jesus. The idea is that the joyful nature of singing alleluia or any of these above listed practices are more appropriately reserved for our Easter celebrations when it is given full and jubilant voice. The penitential character of the season of Lent enjoins the Church asks us to tone our joyful celebrations down until the Easter vigil.