

Praising God with Our Alleluias

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Have you ever had a resurrection experience, when deep despair yielded to marvelous hope? Such an experience came when my mother suffered a cerebral hemorrhage.

For nearly a week, Mom lay in the hospital bed unable to speak or to move. Those days, rife with despair, seemed like an eternity. When the doctors decided to operate, fear tightened its grip. Would she survive the surgery? Would she be able to walk and talk afterward? Would she still be the mom my brother and I knew and loved?

Anxiety and anticipation guided our waiting through the nine-hour ordeal when, finally, the surgeon appeared. He told us that Mom made it through the surgery and said, “If your mom utters anything in the next twenty-four hours, even if it’s gibberish, that will be a great sign.” My brother and I waited near her bedside through the evening hours. Standing over her with tears in our eyes, we were saying good night when it happened, Mom began to speak. We were filled with disbelief and awe. In an instant, pain turned to promise. The only words we could utter were ones of praise and thanksgiving.

Praise and thanksgiving are at the heart of the proclamation of the Gospel. In the Gospel, we find the words and the stories of Jesus, words and stories that transform pain into promise and fill us with praise and thanksgiving. This is why the Gospel is considered the climax of the Liturgy of the Word. The proclamation of the Gospel is so significant that it is usually accompanied by special gestures and symbols, a procession, and the use of candles and incense. This proclamation is preceded by the singing of the Alleluia.

The word *alleluia* is a translation of the word *hallelujah*, which is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that means “Praise God.” This Hebrew word is found throughout the psalms. The psalmist, recalling the times God came to the aid of God’s people, is filled with thanksgiving and summons others to praise God. The only time *hallelujah* is found in the New Testament is in the Book of Revelation, where it serves as a hymn refrain that praises the Risen Christ and celebrates the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.

These passages tell us that the use of the word *alleluia* in worship is ancient. Like our Hebrew ancestors, early Christians also used this word as an expression of joy, thanksgiving, hope, and triumph.

To utter the word *alleluia* is to boast in God, to rise up with resounding praise, to shout for joy. This is one reason we stand as we sing the Alleluia, in anticipation of the words of hope we will hear in the Gospel.



To sing the Alleluia is to anticipate hope, to welcome joy, to encounter divine grace.

After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the Alleluia or another chant laid down by the rubrics is sung, as the liturgical time requires. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the gathering of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel and profess their faith by means of the chant. It is sung by everybody, standing, and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated as the case requires. The verse, on the other hand, is sung either by the choir or by a cantor. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 62)

The verses of the Alleluia are found in the Lectionary and are often connected to the particular Gospel that follows.

During the reflective season of Lent, the Alleluia is replaced with another acclamation of praise. This creates an anticipation of paschal joy that culminates in an expanded and elaborate singing of the Alleluia at the Easter Vigil.

The Alleluia is so important that it is meant to be sung—not spoken. As the Gospel acclamation, the Alleluia bids us to rise to greet God, who lives among us. To sing the Alleluia is to anticipate hope, to welcome joy, to encounter divine grace. Alleluia! Christ is Risen!