

Epistula Lazzarina

Issue 5

The Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem, Grand Priory of Malta, incorporating the Commandery of Gozo

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Editor's Message

Once again Lent is about to start, and we shall not talk today on Carnival as we did last time. As you realize, our topic hopefully incorporates both the religious and disciplinary characters of our Order.

We used to call Lent in Latin *Quadregesima*, and it is this number of 40 I would like to dwell upon today. As you know, it is a number which recurs in our Christian religion, but its origin is quite pagan. In fact, it goes back to Babylonian times, and from Babylon it spread both to ancient Greece and to Israel.

Those pagans believed that the moon was a goddess, and since it regulated the lives of man for regular monthly periods, they came to consider both their calendar and the numbers which made their calendar as sacred. Everything started with the number 3.

3 is the duration of the brightest nights in which full moon lasts: full moon itself, the day before and the day after. 3 is also the duration of nights in which the moon goes missing at the end of the lunar cycle. For three days Jesus was buried, to rise up again the day after the Sabbath.

For the ancients, the moon lasted about 28 days before it regenerated, and the Babylonians, dividing that period into four equal parts, gave us the great sacred number of 7, the common denominator of the four lunar weeks. The Jewish calendar starts in their seventh month, the after the first two weeks each made up of seven days, that is, full moon of Tishrei, the day of Sukkot.

7 and 3 together make 10, another sacred number, 10 being also the number of Commandments Moses gave to the Jews from Mount Sinai. 12 are the complete lunar months within the solar year, and 12 was the number of both the Jewish Patriarchs and our Christian Apostles. 3 times 10 make 30, and together with 3 make 33, the period after 7 days a woman has to wait before she could be claimed as clean after delivering a male child.

30 added to the 10 mentioned already make 40. For 40 years the Jews walked in the desert; for 40 days they celebrated the feast of booths and that of grape harvest; for 40 days Jesus stayed in the desert; for 40 days we wait for Ascension Day after Easter, at least in the universal Church, and for

40 days we celebrate Lent in “our desert”. But Lent does not take us up to Easter, but to Palm Sunday; then follows Holy week. From Ash Wednesday till the first Sunday of Lent we count five days, and then another 35 days, that is, five weeks of seven days each, to come to Palm Sunday which is celebrated a week before Easter.

To combine these sacred numbers and Easter with the moon, Easter has been for millennia of years regulated by the Sunday which occurs after full moon, the latter occurring after the vernal equinox. Since the vernal equinox, the day when in spring the sun is half way in its journey from winter to summer in the northern hemisphere, describes the path of the sun and not the moon, moon and sun came to work out together for millennia of years the fixing of Easter day for both the Jews and our Christian world. Then, by moving backward and counting 7 and 40 days, Holy Week and Lent, Ash Wednesday, this year, will occur on the sixth day of March. Since full moon does not occur on the same day in the solar year, Easter and Ash Wednesday are also not celebrated on the same days every year. Today, we still forecast Easter through the Greek Meton’s 19-year cycle.

In view of the above, appreciating the continuity kept by mankind from antiquity in observing a very important day in our calendar, Easter, we keep as holy not only the numbers which make our liturgical seasons and liturgical rites, but also the significance of holy preparation itself. The desert for the Jews before their entry into the promised land, the desert for Jesus before he entered into his public life, and the penance, prayer and charity which help us to pause, reflect, improve our position and prepare ourselves as we approach Easter are all based on the sacred number of 40 made up, as we said above, of other sacred numbers being 3, 7, 10, 30.

As we look at the moon’s varying phases above our heads, we realize how much our life is regulated by what used to be considered as a benign goddess. Today, we, Christian Members of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem, join the Jews and other Christians in regulating our programme of these holy days leading to Easter. And together with the ancient Babylonians and the Greeks, we, Jews and Christians, fail to deny the existence of this great gift God gave us, a monthly clock to help us think of Him and adjust our lives to perfection, which is God Himself.

Chev. Prof. Horatio Vella

Editor

28th February, 2019

Message from the Senior Chaplain,

Rev. Thomas Moor O.F.M. Conv.

Lent is a series of distinct moments. We begin on Ash Wednesday with the recognition that we are sinners. The ashes with which the priest reminds us - on our very flesh - tell us that we are dust. Lent is not about abstract principles or about self-control. It's not like going to the gym and showing how fit we can get in a few weeks’ time. Lent is about our relationship to GOD, to Christ. What we do and stop doing, we are doing for GOD. Our religion is fundamentally impersonal, which means that even a very small child can live Lent in a deep and holy manner: doing things for Jesus. Lent is not once very simple and conceptually very deep - so it speaks both to the most intelligent

and learned Catholics, and to uneducated and illiterate people, and to every condition and class in between.

Lent ... There is Jesus Christ ... Every Sunday ... No excuses ... Just come home ... The Father is waiting. Mass is a miracle.

Message from Fr Geoffrey G. Attard

Lent is now just round the corner. Easter will come late this year since we will be celebrating the rising of Our Lord from the death on Sunday the 21st of April. As Christians, we are all aware that the Liturgy contains what we call 'tempi forti'. Lent is a case in point! Lent is a special time during which we are called to renew ourselves by doing mainly three important things listed below

1. Reflect more upon the Word of God in the Liturgy
2. Abstain from certain foods and living a life a penance and, last but not least,
3. Giving alms or involving ourselves in charitable works.

However, before being able to do these three, we need to make an examination of conscience. I suggest to myself and to all of you to stop for a while and reflect on the following four points, the first letter of which will make up the word 'Lent'. As members of the Order of St Lazarus, we should feel a holy obligation to take Lent seriously and let it change our hearts from within;

- i. **Be more lenient.** Our Lord showed mercy to those who were in need of it. In today's secular world, the virtue of mercy can be loosely translated as leniency. However it is important to hold to the original virtue in order to be able to show leniency to our neighbour.
- ii. **Empathy.** We should never fall short of showing empathy. It may not be one of the traditional Christian virtues, but it certainly knows its roots to the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ showed empathy with the sick and the needy. We are called to do the same.
- iii. **Nourishing our spirit is what Lent is all about.** The three points above show us the way; it is up to us to follow them. Controlling the flesh by practising penance will lead to a more spiritual lifestyle – we will all benefit from it.
- iv. **Last but not least, let us reflect upon one of the cardinal virtues.** They are also referred to as the human virtues. Temperance in our words and in our actions will lead us to Christ Crucified who gave himself up to us in order to save us.

Metaphorically we can speak of the meeting of Jesus with Lazarus and his sisters in Bethany before He 'went up to Jerusalem' as the first Lent; may this very thought embark us on a plan to live Lent in a better way, keeping Lazarus and his sisters as our spiritual companions. May Lent 2019 lead us to recognize for us the Wisdom of the Cross; may it lead us to eternal pastures!

Forthcoming Event of the Grand Priory of Malta

Saturday, 13th April, 2019

Seder Celebration.

Friday, 26th April, 2019, at 4.00p.m.

Visit to the residents of San Lawrenz Home at San Lawrenz, Gozo, organized by the Gozo Commandery, with the entertainment given by Chev. Paul Gatt.

Saturday, 27th April, 2019, at 10.00a.m.

Visit to the residents of the Mental Ward at Victoria, Gozo, with the entertainment given by Chev. Paul Gatt. Mass and lunch follow at St Mary's Band Club in Żebbuġ, Gozo, from 11.30a.m.

Sunday, 12th May, 2019

Marian Pilgrimage

Recent Events

Sunday, 4th November, 2018, at St Scholastica Monastery's Chapel

Mass for the repose of our dead members



12th December, 2018: Christmas get-together at Torri Lanzun



15th December, 2018: Delivery of cakes, visit and entertainment of the inmates at the Mental Ward, Victoria, Gozo



15th December, 2018: Lunch at St Mary's Band Club, Żebbuġ, Gozo



13th January, 2019: Lunch for the members of the Grand Priory's Council



20th January, 2019: A.G.M. meeting at Frate Jacoba, Marsascalea



Lunch at the end of the A.G.M.

The Editor wishes to thank Chev. Carmelo Saliba, Chev. Godfrey Sammut and Commander Elizabeth Cassar for providing us with the photos above.

10th February, 2019: Visit to the inmates at Casa San Paolo,
Mass at St Paul's Shipwreck Church and Lunch at St Paul's Bay

