

15. 3. 76  
14. 3. 77 ✓  
13. 3. 78 ✓

Kyrie: Fanc (Humbach)  
ARGO 153: Kyrie

(Kyrie XI)  
(Font. O. 108)

LENT PREFACE

The purpose of the season of Lent is the celebration of Easter. And that is a celebration with Christ of His passing from suffering and pain to joy and glory, from the weakness of humanity to the divine power of God, from mankind's divisions and alienations to being at one with God who is Father of all. It's for us, as one of us, that Christ is the way: His passover is humankind's passing over. The mystery of this is what Easter calls us to enter into, what Lent is supposed to prepare us for and help us understand. Is it doing that for you? Will your Easter this year be one that has a deeper meaning for you than just a couple of holidays? Over the year, has the mystery of Easter shed more light for you on life, on the problems and pain of living, the questions about what it's all about, where we are going, what's the point of life and of all that happens so crazily in the topsy-turvy world around us? Perhaps for most people who knew anything about it at all, Lent was for a long time associated just with fasting: and now that any obligation of fasting has gone out of it and we're left to our own devices, maybe the point of the whole exercise has got a bit lost too. You could say, in more senses than one, that the fast of Lent was and is a symbolic thing: we're supposed to be alive to the reality of Christ and the mystery of His death & resurrection, and of course there are many ways for us to bring this home to ourselves. So, might I suggest today another symbol that you might find helpful to prepare for a deeper understanding and celebration of the coming Easter —

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— simply the crucifix. Look at it. Think about it. See what it stands for. Whose figure that is, hanging there. The figure of a man, tortured, suffering. A representation of Christ who did die in such a manner. We keep this reminder of a mode of torture and execution long since abandoned simply because that was the way Christ died, on a cross. But the figure on the cross, in the crucifix before you or that you look at in a book or in a church (and do look at it) — it could be any man. Artists have portrayed all types of man in their Christs. And they're right to do so. And all sorts of shapes for the cross too. And it is every man that you're looking at — it is yourself too, with Christ and in Him and through Him. He is there for you: because of you, instead of you but also with you. The crucifixes we mostly use today are Lenten ones: long ago it was the risen, glorious Christ, with His wounds, that was usually represented in this way — the Easter Day Christ (and that was the reason why, until relatively recently, crucifixes and pictures in churches were covered with a veil during Lent). Now, the figure on the cross is perhaps the best symbol of Lent we can look at, knowing that that was not the end. Even still, it's not so easy to look there: to realize that this is for real: that it's a picture of human life and death we're looking at, our own and everyone's. And for so many people, they don't know or cannot see that this is not the end: and for ourselves so often we cannot see or accept that this is the pattern of our lives. Let us pray that we may see this Lent, with fresh eyes, the figure of Christ on the cross, and the meaning of it all.

MUSIC IN

That was from the 'Stabat Mater' of Franz Portene

Facitt Porten

Rossini sung by Teresa Berganza

MUSIC

PRAYERS

A recital of Giovanni Sabini 1977

Writing many years ago about communism and Christianity, Bishop Fulton Sheen made the comment that the West might well have kept Christ and forgotten His Cross, while the communist block had banished Christ but kept the cross. What western Christianity would have to learn again was that Christ and His cross go together. In the event, I think what Bishop Sheen wrote then has turned out to be more true than he perhaps realized, and in a perhaps different way — so much has happened and changed in nearly 30 years. It might even be that the cross of Christ is even more absent today in much of what's called the West or the developed countries, where Christian faith is betrayed and weakened not by being persecuted but by an environment and style of living that avoids as far as possible having to have any cross, any hardship, any sacrifice. Political, economic or social circumstances in other parts of the world, however, have given back to many Christians the cross they carry now with Christ, perhaps perhaps like Simon of Cyrene. Nobody, in health and sanity wants suffering and pain: and it's not a Christian idea that these are in themselves good things. Christ did not seek crucifixion. But neither did He seek to avoid it, knowing His Father's will that He should accept it in love for mankind. Fasting, penance, self-denial, sacrifice — none of these things come easy to human nature. And they're now, here in our kind of society in HK, so unfashionable. But one way or another they have to come and be accepted if we're to go with Christ through this passover to the greater fullness of life that is meant to be ours. This lent is a training-ground, a practice-run, an exercise to prepare ourselves for the real thing.