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From: Rev. Theodore Book, Director, Office of Divine Worship

To: All Priests, Deacons, Liturgy Coordinators and Music Directors

Date: 12 January, 2007

Re: Lent and Holy Week

I was recently speaking to an outstanding Catholic lady, and she commented that Lent was her favorite time of the year. How true that is for so many of us! We are a people of the resurrection, but it is the season of Lent that sees churches filled, crowds at daily mass, and long lines for confession. This time of repentance and preparation touches something fundamental in each of us, as we gather together on our journey towards the new and definitive Easter. Because this season is so beloved, it is appropriate to focus on celebrating it well, so that it may have the greatest possible efficacy in our lives and communities. As with Advent, I think it is helpful first to reflect on the character of the season, and then to consider how best to express that character in our worship. Just as Advent combines the two mysteries of our Lord's coming as man and His return in glory, so also Lent commemorates both His forty days in the desert and the events leading up to His passion, death, and resurrection. Perhaps more fundamentally, though, in the human experience Lent touches the need for repentance and conversion, the awareness that our lives have not always been what they ought to be, but that there is the possibility of making a change and beginning anew. Perhaps it is this deep human need that accounts for Lent's perennial popularity. How is it possible to express in our worship this sense of conversion and cleansing, of penance that leads to renewal? The answer will vary for each parish, but the church does give us some guidelines to help in our preparation. She suggests a simplicity, even a starkness in the environment and liturgy that mirrors that of a soul bared before God. For that reason, flowers are not to be used (GIRM 305). Some parishes extend this requirement even to weddings, as it encourages the celebration to wait until the Easter season. (I expect that most brides would like to know this before they pick their date, however!) Likewise, with music, "in Lent the playing of the organ and musical instruments is allowed only to support the singing. Exceptions are Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities, and Feasts." (GIRM 313) As Lent progresses, this austerity (which also magnifies the joy of Easter) is increased. In the United States, crosses may be covered following the mass of Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent (March 24<sup>th</sup>) through Good Friday, and other images may remain covered until the Easter Vigil. The removal of holy water from the fonts does not take place until after the mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, when the altar is also stripped. Even at the altar of repose, the blessed sacrament is not exposed in a monstrance, but is kept in a ciborium. (Directory on Popular Piety, 141) Following the distribution of communion on Good Friday, any of the blessed sacrament that remains is reposed in a tabernacle in a place that is not available to public veneration (such as a sacristy) so that the emptying of the church is complete. (Paschales Solemnitatis, 70) After this purgation, life begins anew on the night of Holy Saturday. In Atlanta, Civil Twilight occurs at 8:26 PM on Holy Saturday, so the celebration of the Easter Vigil should begin sometime after that time. Then the glory of Easter will have arrived!