

Music Ministry

Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a shift in the pattern and use of liturgical music. Without abandoning the unique and vital ministry that pastoral musicians have in the liturgy, an evaluation of their role is necessary to restore a renewed sense of ministry to the assembled people of God.

The Church in the Second Vatican Council calls for a more active participation on the part of all worshippers. While there may be laments that the pleasure of listening to a fine choir is gone and that a certain mystery has evaporated to be replaced by more active participation, this should never be an excuse for bad music or inferior skill. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between a concert and the liturgy of the Church.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* gives prominence to the role of God's people. It reminds us that the liturgy is the prayer of the Church as a whole: "Liturgy is the action of Christ and the people of God..." (no. 1). Thus Vatican II has sought to restore the people's action of praising God and interceding for the salvation of the world. The role of the people that has been assumed by other groups or ministries need to be restored to the assembly. Musicians are not performers at liturgy, but they are ministers who, with others, contribute to the prayerfulness of the celebration and the participation of the people.

Liturgy is something primarily sung and the worshipping assembly is the primary singer. As the Second Vatican Council stated: "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.... Sacred music is to be considered the more holy, the more closely connected it is with the liturgical action, whether making prayer more pleasing, promoting unity of minds, or conferring greater solemnity upon the sacred rites". (CSL, 112)

Thus in the liturgy, the human voice should always hold a primary place in the music of the Church; instruments are intended to serve, not to replace or obscure, the praise that comes from the heart (*Musicam sacram*, no. 64). "The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (cf. Col 3.16). Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2.46). Thus Saint Augustine says rightly: 'Singing is for lovers.' There is also the ancient proverb: 'One who sings well prays twice.'" (GIRM no. 39).

The *General Instruction* also speaks of the unique function of the choir. First it is, and must be seen to be, a part of the assembled people of God. It is the task of the choir "to encourage the active participation of the people in the singing" (no. 63). The Instruction also speaks of another function of the choir which is to sing the parts proper to it. There are at least two distinctions to be made: music that belongs to the assembly as a whole (with the choir and/or cantor leading), and music which belongs to the choir or cantor. In an excellent pastoral guide the Bishops Committee on Liturgy of the United States Conference issued the document entitled "The Place of Music in Eucharistic Celebrations." In Canada, the National Liturgical Office prepared "Guidelines For Music In The Mass." These were printed in the choir edition of the Catholic Book of Worship II, nos. 80ff, and will appear in an amended form, in the pastoral notes which will accompany the Catholic Book of Worship III.

In addition to distinguishing between those parts which belong to the people or choir, these guidelines divide the songs which belong to the people into two categories: primary and secondary.

PRIMARY SUNG ELEMENTS

The primary parts of the Eucharist should always be sung by the people (with the support of the choir) at every celebration of the Eucharist, especially on the Lord's Day.

Introductory Rites: Entrance song

Liturgy of the Word: Refrain of the responsorial psalm and the Gospel Acclamation

Liturgy of the Eucharist: the Eucharistic Acclamations: the Holy, Holy, Holy (*Sanctus*); Memorial acclamation and Great Amen; and the Refrain to Communion Song

SECONDARY SUNG ELEMENTS

While it is preferable that the secondary parts of the Eucharist be sung by the people, it is not strictly necessary to sing them at every celebration of the Eucharist. It is desirable that the people participate in them, although the choir may sing a more elaborate setting, with the people joining in a common refrain.

Introductory Rites: Lord, have mercy (*Kyrie*) and the Glory to God (*Gloria*)

Liturgy of the Word: Response to the intercessions

Liturgy of the Eucharist: the Lord's Prayer, the Lamb of God and the hymn of praise after communion

OTHER ELEMENTS

A third category of music does not require singing by the people. At these times the people may sing a hymn or chant but it is not necessary. Instrumental music or a song sung by the choir may be used. These are the hymns at Preparation of Gifts and the Recessional.

Priorities

The above list reflects changes in thinking and practise: abandoning the practise of singing only four hymns at Mass, and respecting the congregational nature of the liturgy. The singing of four hymns during Mass was a temporary measure introduced to accommodate singing in the language of the people without disrupting the structure of the Latin Mass. The singing of only four hymns fails to acknowledge that there are other important, sung elements of the Mass and that singing should surround these parts of the Eucharist. These include the response to the Word of God and the Eucharistic Prayer. Thus present guidelines emphasize singing those parts which express and affirm our faith in God's word and activity in the assembly. These are the primary sung elements of the Eucharist:

Acclamations

The document "Music in Catholic Worship" defines acclamations as "shouts of joy which arise from the whole assembly as forceful and meaningful assents to God's Word and Action. They are important because they make some of the most significant moments of the Mass...stand out" (no. 53). These acclamations are the gospel acclamation, the "Holy, holy," the memorial acclamation and the great "Amen." These should be sung even if nothing else is.

Processional Songs

These are the entrance and communion hymns. It would limit our understanding of liturgy if we saw these only as cover music for movement in the Eucharist. The entrance song is the assembly's first corporate act of worship. For this reason it is usually a hymn of praise. The purpose of the entrance song is to form community; to "intensify the unity of the gathered people, lead their thoughts to the mystery..." that is being celebrated (GIRM, 25). The entrance hymn must be sufficiently long to last throughout the procession, but it should not stop as soon as the priest reaches the chair. A hymn of 4 or 5 verses should be sung in its entirety.

The communion song also fosters unity by helping all to reflect on the meaning of the act of communion. Not only are we in union with Christ, but with the whole body of Christ, represented

by those around us with whom we journey. The hymn chosen at this time should not concentrate on adoration on Jesus, but on opening and elaborating the meaning of communion (see “Music in Catholic Worship, no 62). This does not always have to be a hymn, but may be a song or psalm with a refrain. During the communion procession, a refrain may assist the active participation of the assembly since, ideally, they should not have to carry hymn books when they go to communion.

Responsorial Psalm

After a moment of silence, the psalm and its refrain are the assembly’s response to the word of God in the first reading. As such, the refrain is not the response to the psalm but the response to the preceding reading. The psalm as a whole helps the people to reflect or meditate on the reading. The psalm also helps us to see the true nature of the liturgy of the word as a dialogue between God and the assembly. At least the refrain of the psalm (or a common refrain) should be sung, even if the verses are recited.

Other Hymns

Other hymns may be sung during the Mass. Certainly there should be music, choral or instrumental, to accompany the presentation of gifts and the exiting of the ministers. It is not required that they be sung by the assembly and may be sung by the choir or cantor. At times instrumental music may be desirable.

Introductory Rites

In the past there was a tendency to sing all the parts of the Introductory Rite: the “Lord, have mercy” and the “Glory to God”. If both of these are sung it elongates a part of the Mass that is meant to be brief and preparatory. It is possible to exhaust the assembly before we encounter the main actions of the Eucharist. The “Glory to God” is properly a hymn, therefore, it is meant to be sung. It may be sung by the entire assembly, or by the choir with a refrain to aid the participation of the assembly. It does not seem appropriate to sing the “Lord, have mercy” when the *Gloria* is sung. For this reason it is recommended that the “Glory to God” alone be sung during the Sundays of Christmas, Easter and Ordinary Time. The “Lord, have mercy” or *Kyrie* may be sung during the Sundays of Advent and Lent.

Ritual Chants

The “Lamb of God” and other forms of litany do not necessarily have to be sung entirely by the assembly. Forms of the litany may be sung as a dialogue with the people joining in the response “have mercy on us” and “grant us peace.” It is

recommended that the *Agnus Dei* be sung at the Sunday Eucharist for as long as the breaking of the bread continues.

Words and Texts

Lastly, there needs to be a sensitivity to the words (the text) of songs and chants chosen for the Church’s liturgy. The text needs to reflect who we are as God’s people and what we are doing in the ritual action. These songs assist the assembled people to express their faith in God and to connect what they are doing with the meaning of the rite. That is to say, music, melody and words, must be servants of the liturgy and the people. They must raise us to an increased level of participation that is both spiritual and incarnational. There may be many favourite hymns that, while they are excellent pieces of music, are no longer appropriate for use at the Eucharist or do not help us to worship God. This is especially true of songs sung during the communion procession. A hymn does not become a communion hymn just because it is sung at communion time. Only those hymns whose texts open up for the assembly the meaning of the communion rite should be used. These refer to our union as a community in Christ or deepen our understanding of eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ.

Repetition

A choir or ensemble practices a musical selection many times before leading the liturgical assembly in singing it. However, the people hear and sing it only once. Repetition is an important element in ritual, not only to learn a song, but also that it becomes a part of the assembly’s repertoire. Thus these guidelines for music in the Church call forth a new evaluation and appreciation of the role of music and the assembly in worship. It reminds all of the need to put aside our preferences and see our service as a ministry to enable others to worship in a prayerful environment.

Approved Hymns

The General Instruction now requires that the bishops of each country or region approve the texts that are sung at the Liturgy of the Church. Care should be exercised that hymns are now chosen from approved hymnals.

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the music ministers may be many and have specific roles with a proper competence.

The psalmist is to sing the psalm or other biblical canticle that comes between the readings. To fulfill this function properly, it is necessary that he/she “have the talent for singing and an ability for correct pronunciation and diction” (GIRM no. 102) and keep in mind the recommendation of St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), “Do not mechanically sing the response, but use it as your walking-stick. Remember the responses that you sang, not only one, two or three times, but many times, remember them with interest and then they will be for you a great consolation. I exhort you to not go out from here with empty hands but to collect the responses as pearls, in order to always keep them, meditate on them and sing them to your friends”.

The choir (schola cantorum) “exercises its own liturgical function among the faithful. It is for the choir to ensure that the parts proper to it, in keeping with the different types of chants, are properly carried out and to encourage the active participation of the faithful in the singing.

What is said about the choir also applies in a similar way to other musicians, especially the organist” (GIRM no. 103). “Besides musical formation, suitable liturgical and spiritual formation must also be given to the members of the choir, in such a way that the proper performance of their liturgical role will not only enhance the beauty of the celebration and be an excellent example for the faithful, but will bring spiritual benefit to the choir-members themselves.” Organists and other musicians should not only possess the skill to properly play their instrument: “they should also enter into and be thoroughly aware of the spirit of the Liturgy, so that even when playing *ex tempore*, they will enrich the sacred celebration according to the true nature of each of its parts, and encourage the participation of the faithful.” (Instruction *Musicam sacram* on music in the Liturgy (March 5, 1967) no. 67, in: AAS 59 (1967) page 319. Cf. Id., Instruction *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* (September 3, 1958) no. 24.)

It is fitting that there be a cantor or a choir director to lead and sustain the people in the singing. When there is no choir, “it is up to the cantor to lead the different chants, and the people take part in the way proper to them” (GIRM no. 104).

Working in collaboration with the liturgy committee and the presider, the cantor or choir director should be aware of the dynamics of each liturgical season, of the significance of the

sacraments and of all elements that make a lively celebration (silence, word, movement, action, singing, listening of music, prayer, reading) in order to be able to make a good selection of songs. As servant and minister of the common prayer, he/she should be able to facilitate the participation of all faithful, to coordinate the action of all music ministers and to limit his interventions, following the recommendation of the French musician D. Julien, “When a sentence is enough, do not make a speech; when a word is enough, do not say a sentence; when a gesture is enough, do not say a word; when a look is enough, do not make a gesture”.