

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 6 – God Gave You this Voice; Let Him Hear It

Many people are aware of the proverb that's often attributed to St. Augustine: "Those who sing *well* pray twice." Even if one cannot sing well, we pray when we sing, but there's more.

For what other reasons do we sing during the Mass? The fathers of Vatican II gave us *Musicam Sacram*, the *Instruction on Music in the Liturgy*, [MS], to answer this question. This document says that through song, "[1] prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, [2] the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, [3] the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, [4] minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and [5] the whole celebration more clearly prefigures [the] heavenly liturgy." [MS, 5] So, indeed we sing because it helps us pray. However, we also sing because it is one of the ways that we all *can and should actively participate* in the Mass. We sing because it unites us to one another and to the never-ending Mass of Heaven. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, "The Mass, Part 1 – The Everlasting Banquet," Sept. 16, 2018] Finally, we sing because it is a particular expression of our joy, praise and thanksgiving to God.

Singing during the Mass is intended to be a prayer of the entire congregation. According to *Musicam Sacram*, "The true purpose of sacred music, [...] is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful." [MS, 4] The song is directed toward God. When there is music during Mass, it is not intended as a performance, but an expression of our praise, worship, thanksgiving and prayer to

God. It is for this reason that we do not applaud at the conclusion of a song, as we might at a concert or play. (Really, this is true of other facets of the Mass as well, such as the homily.)

Music also helps to accentuate both the mood and the solemnity of the Mass. For example, during the Christmas season, we might choose joyful music to express the joy we have inside over the miracle of the Nativity, such as "Joy to the World." During Good Friday services, we might choose music that would express our sorrow at the pain that Jesus suffered for our sake, such as "Were You There." You may also notice that more portions of the Mass might be sung during feasts and solemnities (such as Pentecost or the Easter Vigil) than during a regular weekday Mass, thus elevating the solemnity of those occasions.

In this article, we have been discussing "making a joyful noise unto the Lord." [Ps 98] However, we also should discuss the need for balance between music and silence. Just as it is true that we should express our prayer to God in song, it is also true that we should allow time for God to speak to us during the Mass. God speaks best during the times when we are silent. It is for this reason that several moments of silence should be present in every Mass. Specifically, in the order that they occur in the Mass, there should *at least* be silence at the beginning of the Mass before the Penitential Rite [Lord, have mercy...], silence whenever we begin one of the presidential prayers [Let us pray...], silence after the readings and homily, and silence before and after the distribution of Communion.

Next week, we will begin our discussion of the parts of the Mass, beginning with the Introductory Rites.

