

Pertinent Church Documents Cantors

THE GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS OF THE ROMAN MISSAL

CHAPTER II: THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASS, ITS ELEMENTS, AND ITS PARTS

II: THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF THE MASS

The Importance of Singing

[40] Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of peoples and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are in principle meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people not be absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on Holydays of Obligation.

However, in the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, preference is to be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those which are to be sung by the Priest or the Deacon or a reader, with the people replying, or by the Priest and people together.⁴⁹

[41] The main place should be given, all things being equal, to Gregorian chant, as being proper to the Roman Liturgy. Other kinds of sacred music, in particular polyphony, are in no way excluded, provided that they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action and that they foster the participation of all the faithful.⁵⁰

Since the faithful from different countries come together ever more frequently, it is desirable that they know how to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the Profession of Faith and the Lord's Prayer, according to the simpler settings.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Musicam sacram*, March 5, 1967, nos. 7, 16: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967), pp. 302, 305.

⁵⁰ Cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 116; cf. also no. 30.

⁵¹ Cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 54; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Inter Oecumenici*, September 26, 1964, no. 59: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964), p. 891; Instruction, *Musicam sacram*, March 5, 1967, no 47: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967), p. 314.

Silence

[45] Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times.⁵⁴ Its nature, however, depends on the moment when it occurs in the different parts of the celebration. For in the Penitential Act and again after the invitation to pray, individuals recollect themselves; whereas after a reading or after the Homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise God in their hearts and pray to him.

Even before the celebration itself, it is a praiseworthy practice for silence to be observed in the church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room, and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred celebration in a devout and fitting manner.

III: THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE MASS

B) THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

[55] The main part of the Liturgy of the Word is made up of the readings from Sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them. As for the Homily, the Profession of Faith, and the Universal Prayer, they develop and conclude it. For in the readings, as explained by the Homily, God speaks to his people,⁵⁷ opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present through his word in the midst of the faithful.⁵⁸ By silence and by singing, the people make this divine word their own, and affirm their adherence to it by means of the Profession of Faith; finally, having been nourished by the divine word, the people pour out their petitions by means of the Universal Prayer for the needs of the whole Church and for the salvation of the whole world.

Silence

[56] The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to favor meditation, and so any kind of haste such as hinders recollection is clearly to be avoided. In the course of it, brief periods of silence are also appropriate, accommodated to the assembled congregation; by means of these, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be

⁵⁴ Cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 30; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Musicae sacram*, March 5, 1967, no. 17: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967), p. 305.

⁵⁷ Cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 33.

⁵⁸ Cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Reading, and lastly at the conclusion of the Homily.⁵⁹

The Responsorial Psalm

[61] After the First Reading follows the Responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and which has great liturgical and pastoral importance, since it fosters meditation on the Word of God.

The Responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should usually be taken from the Lectionary.

It is preferable for the Responsorial Psalm to be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. Hence the psalmist, or cantor of the Psalm, sings the Psalm verses at the ambo or another suitable place, while the whole congregation sits and listens, normally taking part by means of the response, except when the Psalm is sung straight through, that is, without a response. However, in order that the people may be able to sing the Psalm response more easily, texts of some responses and Psalms have been chosen for the different times of the year or for the different categories of Saints. These may be used instead of the text corresponding to the reading whenever the Psalm is sung. If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in a way that is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the Word of God.

In the Dioceses of the United States of America, instead of the Psalm assigned in the Lectionary, there may be sung either the Responsorial Gradual from the *Graduale Romanum*, or the Responsorial Psalm or the *Alleluia* Psalm from the *Graduale Simplex*, as described in these books, or an antiphon and Psalm from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, including Psalms arranged in metrical form, providing that they have been approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm.

The Acclamation before the Gospel

[62] After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the *Alleluia* or another chant laid down by the rubrics is sung, as the liturgical time requires. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the gathering of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel and profess their faith

⁵⁹ Cf. *Missale Romanum, Ordo lectionum Missae*, editio typica altera, 1981, no. 28.

by means of the chant. It is sung by everybody, standing, and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated as the case requires. The verse, on the other hand, is sung either by the choir or by a cantor.

- a) The *Alleluia* is sung in every time of the year other than Lent. The verses are taken from the Lectionary or the *Graduale*.
- b) During Lent, instead of the *Alleluia*, the Verse before the Gospel as given in the Lectionary is sung. It is also possible to sing another Psalm or Tract, as found in the *Graduale*.

[63] When there is only one reading before the Gospel:

- a) during a time of year when the *Alleluia* is prescribed, either an *Alleluia* Psalm or the Responsorial Psalm followed by the *Alleluia* with its verse may be used;
- b) during a time of year when the *Alleluia* is not foreseen, either the Psalm and the Verse before the Gospel or the Psalm alone may be used;
- c) the *Alleluia* or the Verse before the Gospel, if not sung, may be omitted.

[64] The Sequence which, except on Easter Sunday and on Pentecost Day, is optional, is sung before the *Alleluia*.