

Pertinent Church Documents

Cantors

SING TO THE LORD: MUSIC IN DIVINE WORSHIP

CHAPTER I: WHY WE SING

[1] God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source. Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises.²

[2] A cry from deep within our being, music is a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things.³ As St. Augustine says, “Singing is for the one who loves.”⁴ Music is therefore a sign of God’s love for us and of our love for him. In this sense, it is very personal. But unless music sounds, it is not music, and whenever it sounds, it is accessible to others. By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension. Thus, it is no wonder that singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people.

[3] Our ancestors reveled in this gift, sometimes with God’s urging. “Write out this song, then, for yourselves,” God said to Moses. “Teach it to the Israelites and have them recite it, so that this song may be a witness for me.”⁵ The Chosen People, after they passed through the Red Sea, sang as one to the Lord.⁶ Deborah, a judge of Israel, sang to the Lord with Barak after God gave them victory.⁷ David and the Israelites “made merry before the Lord with all their strength, with singing and with citharas, harps, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.”⁸

[4] Jesus and his apostles sang a hymn before their journey to the Mount of Olives.⁹ St. Paul instructed the Ephesians to “[address] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts.”¹⁰ He sang with Silas in

² “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy” (1 Cor 3: 16-17).

³ See St. Augustine, Epis. 161, *De origine animae hominis*, 1, 2; PL XXXIII, 725, as quoted in Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *On Sacred Music (Musicae Sacrae Disciplina)* (MSD), no. 5, www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25121955_musicae-sacrae_en.html.

⁴ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 336, 1 (PL 1844-1855, 38, 1472).

⁵ Dt 31: 19.

⁶ Ex 15: 1-18, 21.

⁷ Jgs 4: 4-5: 31.

⁸ 2 Sm 6:5.

⁹ See Mt 26: 30; Mk 14: 26

¹⁰ Eph 5: 18-19

captivity.¹¹ The letter of St. James asks, “Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise.”¹²

[5] Obedient to Christ and to the Church, we gather in liturgical assembly, week after week. As our predecessors did, we find ourselves “singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in [our] hearts to God.”¹³ This common, sung expression of faith within the liturgical celebrations strengthens our faith when it grows weak and draws us into the divinely inspired voice of the Church at prayer. Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it. Good music “make[s] the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive and fervent so that everyone can praise and beseech the Triune God more powerfully, more intently and more effectively.”¹⁴

[6] “In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols... Inasmuch as they are creatures, these perceptible realities can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God.”¹⁵ This sacramental principle is the consistent belief of the Church throughout history. In Liturgy, we use words, gestures, signs, and symbols to proclaim Christ’s presence and to reply with our worship and praise.

[7] The primordial song of the Liturgy is the canticle of victory over sin and death. It is the song of the saints, standing beside “the sea of glass”: “They were holding God’s harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”¹⁶ Liturgical singing is established in the midst of this great historical tension. For Israel, the event of salvation in the Red Sea will always be the main reason for praising God, the basic theme of the songs it sings before God. For Christians, the Resurrection of Christ is the true Exodus... The definitively new song has been intoned...¹⁷

[8] The Paschal hymn, of course, does not cease when a liturgical celebration ends. Christ, whose praises we have sung, remains with us and leads us through church doors to the whole world, with its joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties.¹⁸ The words Jesus chose from the book of Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry become the song of the Body of Christ. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, / because he has anointed me / to

¹¹ “About midnight...Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, as the other prisoners listened” (Acts 16:25).

¹² Jas 5: 13.

¹³ Col 3: 16; see *General Instructions of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), no. 39 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2003). See Eph 5: 19.

¹⁴ MSD, no. 31; see no. 33.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 2nd ed., nos. 1146, 1148 (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana—USCCB, 2000).

¹⁶ Rev 15: 3

¹⁷ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press, 2000), 137-138.

¹⁸ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*) (GS), no. 1, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996). All subsequent Second Vatican Council passages come from the Flannery edition.

bring glad tidings to the poor. / He has sent me to proclaim liberty to / captives and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free, / and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”¹⁹

[9] Charity, justice, and evangelization are thus the normal consequences of liturgical celebration. Particularly inspired by sung participation, the body of the Word Incarnate goes forth to spread the Gospel with full force and compassion. In this way, the Church leads men and women “to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ by the example of its life and teaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace. Its aim is to open up for all men a free and sure path to full participation in the mystery of Christ.”²⁰

PARTICIPATION

[10] Holy Mother Church clearly affirms the role within worship of the entire liturgical assembly (bishop, priest, deacon, acolytes, ministers of the Word, music leaders, choir, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and the congregation). Through grace, the liturgical assembly partakes in the life of the Blessed Trinity, which is itself a communion of love. In a perfect way, the Persons of the Trinity remain themselves even as they share all that they are. For our part, “we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.”²¹ The Church urges all members of the liturgical assembly to receive this divine gift and to participate fully “depending on their orders [and] their role in the liturgical services.”²²

[11] Within the gathered assembly, the role of the congregation is especially important. “The full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.”²³

[12] Participation in the Sacred Liturgy must be “internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace.”²⁴ Even when listening to the various prayers and readings of the Liturgy or to the singing of the choir, the assembly continues to participate actively as they “unite themselves interiorly to what the ministers or choir sing, so that by listening to them they may raise their minds to God.”²⁵ “In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative

¹⁹ Lk 4: 18; see Is 61: 1-2, 58: 6.

²⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity)* (AG), No. 5.

²¹ Rom 12: 5-6.

²² Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)* (SC), no. 26.

²³ SC, no. 14.

²⁴ Sacred Congregation for Rites, *Musica Sacram (Instruction on Music in the Liturgy)* (MS), no. 15, in Flannery, Vatican Council II; see SC, no. 11.

²⁵ MS, no. 15.

quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty. Here we see how the liturgy, though it must always be properly inculturated, must also be counter-cultural.”²⁶

[13] Participation must also be external, so that internal participation can be expressed and reinforced by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes, and by the acclamations, responses, and singing.²⁷ The quality of our participation in such sung praise comes less from our vocal ability than from desire of our hearts to sing together of our love for God. Participation in the Sacred Liturgy both expresses and strengthens the faith that is in us.

[14] Our participation in the Liturgy is challenging. Sometimes, our voices do not correspond to the convictions of our hearts. At other times, we are distracted or preoccupied by the cares of the world. Christ always invites us, however, to enter into song, to rise above our own preoccupations, and to give our entire selves to the hymn of his Paschal Sacrifice for the honor and glory of the Most Blessed Trinity.

CHAPTER II: THE CHURCH AT PRAYER

E. MINISTERS OF LITURGICAL MUSIC

The Psalmist

[34] The psalmist, or “cantor of the psalm,” proclaims the Psalm after the first reading and leads the gathered assembly in singing the refrain.⁴² The psalmist may also, when necessary, intone the Gospel Acclamation and verse.⁴³ Although this ministry is distinct from the role of the cantor, the two ministries are often entrusted to the same person.

[35] Persons designated for the ministry of psalmist should possess “the ability for singing and a facility in correct pronunciation and diction.”⁴⁴ As one who proclaims the Word, the psalmist should be able to proclaim the text of the Psalm with clarity, conviction, and sensitivity to the text, the musical setting, and those who are listening.

[36] The psalmist sings the verses of the Responsorial Psalm from the ambo or another suitable place.⁴⁵ The psalmist may dress in an alb or choir robe, but always wears clean, presentable, and modest clothing. Cassock and surplice, being clerical attire, are not recommended as vesture for the psalmist.

²⁶ Pope John Paul II, Address to Bishops of the Northwest Provinces of the USCCB, in *Ad Limina Addresses: The Addresses of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the United States, February 1998-October 1998* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998), no. 3.

²⁷ See SC, no. 30.

⁴² LFM, no. 56.

⁴³ See LFM, no. 56.

⁴⁴ GIRM, no. 102. See LFM, no. 56.

⁴⁵ See GIRM, no. 61.

The Cantor

[37] The cantor is both a singer and a leader of congregational song. Especially when no choir is present, the cantor may sing in alternation or dialogue with the assembly. For example, the cantor may sing the invocations of the *Kyrie*, intone the *Gloria*, lead the short acclamations at the end of the Scripture readings, intone and sing the verse of the Gospel Acclamation, sing the invocations of the Prayer of the Faithful, and lead the singing of the *Agnus Dei*. The cantor may also sing the verses of the psalm or song that accompany the Entrance, Preparation of the Gifts, and the Communion. Finally, the cantor may serve as psalmist, leading and proclaiming the verses of the Responsorial Psalm.

[38] As a leader of congregational song, the cantor should take part in singing with the entire gathered assembly. In order to promote the singing of the liturgical assembly, the cantor's voice should not be heard above the congregation. As a transitional practice, the voice of the cantor might need to be amplified to stimulate and lead congregational singing when this is still weak. However, as the congregation finds its voice and sings with increasing confidence, the cantor's voice should correspondingly recede. At times, it may be appropriate to use a modest gesture that invites participation and clearly indicates when the congregation is to begin, but gestures should be used sparingly and only when genuinely needed.

[39] Cantors should lead the assembly from a place where they can be seen by all without drawing attention from the liturgical action. When, however, a congregation is singing very familiar responses, acclamations, or songs that do not include verses for the cantor alone, the cantor need not be visible.

[40] The cantor exercises his or her ministry from a conveniently located stand, but not from the ambo.⁴⁶ The cantor may dress in an alb or choir robe, but always in clean, presentable, and modest clothing. Cassock and surplice, being clerical attire, are not recommended as vesture for the cantor.

⁴⁶ See. LFM, no. 33.

CHAPTER V: THE MUSICAL STRUCTURE OF CATHOLIC WORSHIP

A. MUSIC AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASS

The Liturgy of the Word

The Responsorial Psalm

[155] The Responsorial Psalm follows the first reading. Because it is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word, and is in effect a reading from Scripture, it has great liturgical and pastoral significance.¹²³ Corresponding to the reading that it follows, the Responsorial Psalm is intended to foster meditation on the Word of God. Its musical setting should aid in this, being careful to not overshadow the other readings.¹²⁴

[156] “As a rule the Responsorial Psalm should be sung.”¹²⁵ Preferably, the Psalm is sung responsorially: “the psalmist, or cantor of the psalm, sings the psalm verses and the whole congregation joins in by singing the response.”¹²⁶ If this is not possible, the Psalm is sung completely without an intervening response by the community.

[157] The proper or seasonal Responsorial Psalm from the *Lectionary for Mass*, with the congregation singing the response, is to be preferred to the gradual from the *Graduale Romanum*.¹²⁷ When the Latin gradual is sung *in directum* (straight through) by choir alone, the congregation should be given a vernacular translation.

[158] Because the Psalm is properly a form of sung prayer, “every means available in each individual culture is to be employed”¹²⁸ in fostering the singing of the Psalm at Mass, including the extraordinary options provided by the *Lectionary for Mass*. In addition to the proper or seasonal Psalm in the *Lectionary*, the Responsorial Psalm may also be taken from the *Graduale Romanum* or the *Graduale Simplex*, or it may be an antiphon and psalm from another collection of the psalms and antiphons, including psalms arranged in paraphrase or in metrical form, providing that they have been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the diocesan bishop.

[159] Songs or hymns that do not at least paraphrase a psalm may never be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm.¹²⁹

¹²³ LFM, nos. 19-22; see GIRM, no. 61.

¹²⁴ See LFM, no. 19.

¹²⁵ LFM, no. 20.

¹²⁶ LFM, no. 20.

¹²⁷ “The Responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should, as a rule, be taken from the Lectionary” (GIRM, no. 61; see LFM, nos. 20, 89).

¹²⁸ LFM, no. 21.

¹²⁹ See GIRM, no. 61.

[160] If it is not possible for the Psalm to be sung, the response alone may be sung, while the lector reads the intervening verses of the Psalm “in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ LFM, no. 22; see LFM, no.21.