



## Music at Mass

(Cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal/GIRM)



### The Importance of Singing

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 (Col. 3:16). Great importance should be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass. Every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation, (*GIRM*, nos. 39, 40). Pastoral musicians should consider how best to encourage the full, conscious, and active participation of the whole assembly. All musical choices are made in line with the three-fold **Liturgical, Musical, and Pastoral** judgement criteria, (See Below).

### Introductory Rites

#### The Entrance Song

After the people have gathered, the opening song begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. The opening song is sung even if there is no procession to the altar. The four-fold purpose of this song is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, lead their thoughts to the mystery of the season or feast, and accompany the entrance procession. It is sung by the cantor/choir and people, entirely by the people, or by the choir alone. The nature of the song as expressing and fostering the unity of the assembled Body of Christ suggests that this last option would be rarely employed, (nos. 47, 48).

#### The Act of Penitence

The *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord have mercy") is a litany that may be sung, especially in penitential seasons. The *Kyrie eleison* functions as a separate ritual element when the *Confiteor* ("I confess...") is used, or as a response to the tropes in praise of Christ in the other forms. On occasion, especially on the Sundays of the Easter Season, in place of the customary Act of Penitence, the blessing and sprinkling of water to recall Baptism may take place, (nos. 51, 52).

#### The Gloria

The *Gloria* is an ancient hymn of praise. It is sung or said on Sundays outside of Advent and Lent, on solemnities and Feasts, and at celebrations of a more solemn character. The text of this hymn **may not** be replaced by any other. The opening words of the Gloria are intoned by the priest or, if appropriate, by a cantor or by the choir. The body of the hymn is sung either by everyone together, or by the people alternately with the choir/cantor, or by the choir alone, (n. 53).

## **Liturgy of the Word**

### **The Responsorial Psalm**

The *Responsorial Psalm* is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance because it fosters meditation on the Word of God. It is preferable that the Responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. The psalmist sings the verses from the ambo or another suitable place. The text of the Responsorial Psalm should be taken from the Lectionary selection of the day. A seasonal psalm, (cf. n. 173-4, pages 44, 107, 251, 433, 768 in the Sunday Lectionary for the common seasonal psalms) or another psalm approved by the Conference of Bishops or the diocesan bishop may also be used. Songs or hymns **may not** be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm. If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the Word of God, (n. 61). The *GIRM* makes no mention of the choir having any role in the psalm. Like other portions of Scripture that are proclaimed, a high value is placed on communicating the text as intelligibly as possible—by an individual psalmist rather than by a group of singers.

### **The Gospel Acclamation**

The *Gospel Acclamation* 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. The Alleluia (or another acclamation during Lent), led by the cantor or choir, is sung by all. The verse, however, is sung either by the cantor or the choir, (n. 62). When there is only one reading before the Gospel, as at weekday Masses, the Alleluia or acclamation may be sung after the psalm, or may be used as the psalm response. If not sung it may be omitted, (n. 63).

### **The Prayer of the Faithful**

The *Prayer of the Faithful* is both a response to the Word of God and an exercise of the baptismal priesthood of the faithful. The priest directs the prayer from his chair. The intentions are announced from the ambo or from some other suitable place, by the deacon, a cantor, a lector, or one of the lay faithful, (n.71). A period of silence is observed after the announcement of each intention but before the invitation “we pray to the Lord...” On occasion the petitions may be sung. A sung response by the assembly can help to express the importance of the intercessions as the priestly ministry of the whole community.

## **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

### **The Preparation of the Gifts**

The procession and placement of the gifts is accompanied by a song which continues until at least the gifts have been placed on the altar. However, it may not always be necessary or desirable to sing at this time, therefore organ or instrumental music is also an option. When song is used any appropriate song of

praise or of rejoicing in keeping with the season is the best choice. The norms on the manner of singing are the same as for the entrance song. It may be sung even when there is no procession with the gifts, (n. 74).

### **Music during the Eucharistic Prayer and Other Presidential Prayers**

The nature of the presidential prayers requires that they be spoken in a clear voice and that everyone listen to them attentively. Therefore, there should be no singing or instrumental music during the recitation of these prayers, (n. 32). However, this should not preclude the singing of the Preface Dialogue as a noble entry into the Eucharistic Prayer which is the most solemn part of the Mass.

### **The Eucharistic Acclamations**

The *Holy, Holy, Holy*, the *Memorial Acclamation*, and the *Great Amen* are sung by all the people. These acclamations ought to be sung even at Masses in which little else is sung, (n. 79).

### **The Lord's Prayer**

The priest pronounces the invitation to the Lord's Prayer and the people pray it with him; then the priest alone adds the embolism (*Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil...*), which the people conclude by means of the doxology. If the Lord's Prayer is sung, it should be sung by all the people, (n. 81).

### **The Lamb of God**

The *Lamb of God* litany is usually sung by a cantor or choir with the assembly responding. This litany accompanies the Fraction Rite and may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite is concluded. The last time ends with "grant us peace." If the Lamb of God is not sung it is recited, (n. 83). Alternate tropes **may not** be added to this litany, (n. 366).

### **The Communion Song**

The *Communion Song* begins while the priest is receiving Communion. The purpose of the Communion Song is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the communitarian nature of the procession to receive communion, (nos. 86, 159). The Communion Song is sung either by the cantor/choir with the people or by the choir alone. Although the *GIRM* allows the song to be sung by the choir alone, the active participation of the whole assembly is more in keeping with its function "to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices," (nos. 86, 87). Pastoral sensitivity is encouraged in the choice of Communion Songs; for example, paying attention to songs with familiar refrains so that the communicants may participate while processing without having to carry a hymnal. The options for choosing the Entrance Song, the song at the Preparation of Gifts and the Communion Song are the same. The text may be an antiphon and psalm drawn from the Roman Gradual, the Simple Gradual, or another approved collection. Instead of an antiphon and psalm, some other suitable liturgical song may be

chosen, (n. 87). The text chosen should be consistent with the nature of the Communion Song as expressing unity and joy of heart. In general, during the most important seasons of the Church Year, Easter, Lent, Christmas and Advent, it is preferable that most songs used at Communion be seasonal in nature.

### **Optional Song of Praise after Communion**

On occasion, the entire assembly may sing a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn after the period of silence and before the Prayer after Communion, (n. 88).

### **Concluding Rite**

#### **The Recessional Song**

After the blessing, the deacon or priest dismisses the people “so that each may go out to do good works, praising and blessing God,” (n. 90). Even though the *GIRM* does not explicitly mention singing at the end of Mass, because the text describes the community leaving “praising and blessing God,” it has been customary in most parishes to sing a closing song. When music is used for the dismissal it should express joyful praise of God as members of the assembly go out to take up the mission of Christ in the world.

## **Further Considerations**

### **Copyright**

Copyright is a serious legal matter which must be respected by parishes and their music ministries. The rationale for respecting copyright and suggestions for fulfilling this obligation may be found in *Rights and Permissions Policy* (CCCB Publications, 2015).

Having obtained a copyright license, this information must be included on each reproduction (ie. name of composer, holder of copyright, the license number, etc.), be it projected from a laptop, on an overhead, in a locally made song book, or on individual sheets.

### **Responsorial Psalms for use in Canada**

In Canada, the Responsorial Psalm is to be taken directly from the text in the Lectionary. In 2009, the translation of the Lectionary for use in Canada was revised. The Responsorial Psalms found in the CBW III are of a translation which predates the revisions of the Lectionary. The Psalms found in the Novalis *Living With Christ* missalettes and the *Sunday Missals* are the new translations. These settings by Gordon Johnston are also available for musicians and cantors in Year A, B, and C volumes from Novalis.

CCCB Publications now has available *Psalms: Sundays and Solemnities (NRSV Translation)* for the liturgical Years A, B, C. This is a publication composed of Psalm Settings for the NRSV Psalms, coinciding with the Canadian Edition of the *Lectionary: Sundays and Solemnities*.

Most of the settings were composed by Canadian composers. There is a generous selection of Psalms for each Sunday, solemnity and even Common “Seasonal Psalms”. The book is designed to enable cantors and assemblies to sing the Responsorial Psalm during Sunday Mass and Solemnities as simply as possible. Each book is divided into two sections, the first for musicians/cantors contains the entire Psalm (refrain, verses and complete music); the second contains the refrain with music for the assembly.

Each publication includes:

- For musicians: complete music for keyboard and guitar
- For cantors: complete music for refrains and verse tones
- For the assembly: accessible melodies for the refrain
- Copyright permissions: Both the music for the musicians /cantors and that for the assembly can be copied (or projected)
- A CD is included with:
  - PDF files for easy duplication (up to a maximum number of copies without having to seek copyright permission) or projection
  - MP3 files with a sample of the refrain and verses (music and cantor)

\*\*\* *Psalms: Sundays and Solemnities (NRSV Translation)* is available from Burns/Hanley Church Supplies, Regina. Cost is approximately \$75.00.

It is important to note that in Canada only approved Psalm texts from the Lectionary are permitted for liturgical use. One may find differences when using a hymnal produced in the United States where adapted texts of psalms are often incorporated.

### **Lamb of God Litanies**

The *Lamb of God* litany is usually sung by a cantor or choir with the assembly responding. This litany accompanies the Fraction Rite and may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite is concluded. The last time ends with “grant us peace.” If the Lamb of God is not sung it is recited, (n. 83).

Alternate tropes may not be added to this litany, (n. 366). Musical settings of the *Lamb of God* from the United States which incorporate alternate tropes in praise of Christ are not permitted for liturgical use in Canada.

## **Judging the Qualities of Liturgical Music**

### **The Three Judgments: One Evaluation**

In judging the appropriateness of music for the Liturgy, one will examine its **liturgical, pastoral** and **musical** qualities. Ultimately, however, these three judgments are but aspects of one evaluation, which answers the question: “Is this particular piece of music appropriate for use in this particular liturgy?” All three judgements must be considered together, and no individual judgement can be applied in isolation from the other two. This evaluation requires cooperation, consultation, collaboration, and mutual respect among those who are skilled in any of the three judgments, be they pastors, musicians, liturgists, or planners.

## **1. The Liturgical Judgment**

The question asked by this judgment may be stated as follows: “Is this composition capable of meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth by the liturgical books for this particular rite?”

Structural considerations depend on the demands of the rite itself to guide the choice of parts to be sung, taking into account the principle of progressive solemnity. A certain balance among the various elements of the Liturgy should be sought, so that less important elements do not overshadow more important ones. Textual elements include the ability of a musical setting to support the liturgical text and to convey meaning faithful to the teaching of the Church.

Pastoral musicians should develop a working familiarity with the requirements of each rite through a study of the liturgical books themselves.

## **2. The Pastoral Judgment**

The pastoral judgment takes into consideration the actual community gathered to celebrate in a particular place at a particular time. Does a musical composition promote the sanctification of the members of the liturgical assembly by drawing them closer to the holy mysteries being celebrated? Does it strengthen their formation in faith by opening their hearts to the mystery being celebrated on this occasion or in this season? Is it capable of expressing the faith that God has planted in their hearts and summoned them to celebrate?

Other factors—such as the age, culture, language, and education of a given liturgical assembly—must also be considered. Particular musical forms and the choice of individual compositions for congregational participation will often depend on those ways in which a particular group finds it easiest to join their hearts and minds to the liturgical action. Similarly, the musical experience of a given assembly is to be carefully considered, lest forms of musical expression that are alien to their way of worshipping be introduced. On the other hand, one should never underestimate the ability of persons of all ages, cultures, languages, and levels of education to learn something new and to understand things that are properly and thoroughly introduced.

The pastoral question, finally, is always the same: “Will this composition draw this particular people closer to the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of this liturgical celebration?”

## **3. The Musical Judgment**

The musical judgment asks whether this composition has the necessary aesthetic qualities that can bear the weight of the mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy. It asks the question: “Is this composition technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy?”

This judgment requires musical competence. Only artistically sound music will be effective and endure over time. To admit to the Liturgy the cheap, the trite, or the musical cliché often found in secular popular songs is to cheapen the Liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure.

Sufficiency of artistic expression, however, is not the same as musical style, for the Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her own. She has admitted styles from every period, in keeping with the natural characteristics and conditions of peoples and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in recent times, the Church has consistently recognized and freely welcomed the use of various styles of music.