



Music & the Mass

The what, when, why & huh?

Part II, Congregational Singing

I would like to dispel the myth that if you're not singing at Mass, you're just not participating as actively as you should be. I think some people are very concerned with this issue. Let's look at how can we maximize our participation and congregational singing when we come from such different musical backgrounds. Some people can read music; others try to follow the shape of the phrases. If the little black dots go high, they reach for a high note. If the little black dots go low, they reach for a low note. Some people can jump right in and sight read a Palestrina motet. Others can only sing along if they've heard the melody several times first. Having the music in the hymnal only helps them in remembering the text. Having the notes on the page matters not.

This is a timeless issue. It has always existed and will never go away. So how do we keep everyone happy? Well, let's talk about what the Church expects from us and let's try to conform to that as much as possible. Everything our Church gives us ultimately results in our true happiness. Why not with music as well?

We will begin by looking at what the *GIRM* (General Instructions on the Roman Missal) tells us. "Among the faithful, the schola cantorum or choir exercises its own liturgical function, ensuring that the parts proper to it, in keeping with the different types of chants, are properly carried out and fostering the active participation of the faithful through the singing." (103) We should distinguish between *active* and *actual* participation. If the schola or choir is fulfilling its function, the congregation should *actually* be drawn into prayer whether they are *actively* singing or not. *Actual* implies an even deeper level of participation than does *active*. Deacon Schaefer, professor of music at Gonzaga University, says to sing the songs in your heart until you're ready to sing them out loud with your voice.

While the schola or choir has an important liturgical function, we should also notice that the *GIRM* has specific expectations of participation for the congregation as well. "Since the celebration of Mass by its nature has a "communitarian" character, both the dialogues between the priest and the faithful gathered together and the acclamations are of great significance; in fact, they are simply outward signs of communal celebration but foster and bring about communion between priest and people." (34) "The acclamations and the responses of the faithful to the priest's greetings and prayers constitute that level of active participation that the gathered faithful are to contribute in every form of the Mass, so that the action of the entire community may be clearly expressed and fostered." (35) If we use *Musicam Sacram* (1967) as a guide, the faithful will be continually led toward an ever greater participation in the singing. It can be broken down into three degrees.

(Over)

The first degree includes

- a) The entrance rites: the greeting of the priest together with the reply of the people; the prayer.
- b) In the Liturgy of the Word: the acclamations at the Gospel.
- c) In the Eucharistic Liturgy: the prayer over the offerings; the preface with its dialogue and the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy); the final doxology of the Canon, the Lord's Prayer with its introduction and embolism; the Pax Domini (the Peace of the Lord); the prayer after Communion; the formulas of dismissal.

These melodies are short and consistent. We can easily learn these responses/songs by ear, singing them with our heart and our voice.

The second degree includes the Kyrie, Gloria, Creed and Agnus Dei. The second degree music becomes a little more difficult. The melodies are longer and can change depending on the Mass setting being used. However, familiarity will increase our comfortability in learning and singing these parts. If they change, give yourself a few weeks to soak them in and then sing them when you're ready. If you feel unable to sing these parts, please meditate on the words. These Mass parts are beautiful and timeless prayers.

The third degree includes the Propers or other suitable songs for the Mass. Examples would be the Introit or processional hymn, the responsorial Psalm, the Alleluia before the Gospel, offertory hymn and the Communion antiphon or Communion hymn. Much of the third degree music may be more suited for a schola or choir. At the 11:30 AM Mass, we will be singing more of the Propers and Mass parts in Latin. At 5:00 PM, 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM, almost everything will be sung in English and will be available in your hymnal. We strongly encourage you to sing the parts and songs with which you are comfortable. We also want you understand that your level of participation does not decrease if you are unable or choose not to sing along.

The CMAA (Church Music Association of America) reminds us that "many people want to reduce the Church mandate concerning the role of the congregation to a single instruction: singing as much as possible. Any music that people do not or cannot sing is thereby excluded from liturgical use. This is an interpretation that has been specifically rejected by all Popes for a century. Indeed, *Musicam Sacram* of 1967 legislates in favor of permitting a full choral Ordinary, while the current *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* specifically names parts of the Mass that can be sung by the choir alone. Hence, the conscientious and diligent church musician must not allow himself to be misled by a one-sided misinterpretation of the conciliar texts."

Pope John Paul II's Ad Limina Address to the Bishops of the US (October 9, 1998) says: "active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it. Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active."

Meeting the Church's directives regarding what is obligatory and universal in liturgical music forms the foundation of sacred music in any given parish. To many people today, the idea that there are obligatory and universal rules regarding music at Mass is a totally new concept because there has not been an active effort on the part of pastors and parish musicians to implement these guidelines. In our parish, the decision has been made to put these basic guidelines into practice. We will continue to work on educating our parishioners on what the expectations are and how we are able to meet them. In an effort to assist those of you who are uncomfortable singing, adult music workshops will be offered in the near future.

Next week: What is a Proper and what is happening at 11:30? We'll give you specifics!

God Bless You!

Fr. Lappe and Kristin Yoshimura