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# THE MINISTRY OF MUSIC

Revised Edition

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# Introduction

Today, many years after the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy<sup>1</sup>, singing the liturgy has become normative. But as we have grown in our practice of sung liturgy, our need to understand more clearly the theological reasons for this singing has also grown. Many of the “whats” and the “how-tos” have fallen into place, but the “why” often still eludes us.

As with the 2004 edition of *The Ministry of Music*, this revised edition approaches the “why” of liturgical music from the theological perspective that liturgy makes present the paschal mystery. As the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy teaches us, Christ achieved our redemption by “the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby ‘dying, he destroyed our death and rising, restored our life’” (5). Through baptism, we are plunged into this mystery: we die with Christ, are buried with him, and rise with him. From Pentecost onward “the church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery” (6).

This book explores communal liturgical singing in terms of how it enables us, the Body of Christ, to enter more fully into ritual enactment of the paschal mystery. The “whats” and “how-tos” of music ministry are then developed from this perspective. How does communal liturgical singing enable us to participate in and surrender to the paschal mystery? What musical and pastoral choices best enable the singing to fulfill this role? And how does

the singing form us in a paschal mystery spirituality that shapes daily Christian living and makes the relationship between liturgy and life more evident?

What has necessitated this revision of *The Ministry of Music* is the change in our liturgical-musical landscape precipitated by the appearance of *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*<sup>2</sup> (STL) in 2007 and the promulgation of the third edition of the Roman Missal in 2011. Some of what appears in this revision appeared in the first edition; some of what appeared in the first edition but not repeated here is still worth reading and contemplating. As with the first edition, much of what is included in this second version was originally published in my Music Notes column in *Liturgical Ministry*.

Digesting STL is a complex process. To discern the meaning and application of its directives requires quite a bit of cross-referencing within the document itself. To determine the weight of specific directives requires counterbalancing a great deal of “but” and “both-and” content. We cannot pick and choose single sentences or paragraphs without nuancing their content vis-à-vis other sentences and paragraphs. So, how do we approach studying, understanding, and applying STL? Perhaps the best way is in bits and pieces chewed slowly, then chewed again.

This revised edition of *The Ministry of Music* addresses only certain bits and pieces of the totality of liturgical music ministry. It takes a specific focus—the paschal mystery as the core of the liturgical rite—and hones in on how communal liturgical singing is meant to enable the rite to make this mystery present and the people to surrender themselves to its transforming power. It further narrows this focus to the singing of the Mass, particularly the Sunday eucharistic celebration.

Chapter 1 lays theological foundations defining liturgy as ritual participation in the paschal mystery, and theoretical foundations describing how liturgical singing facilitates this participation. Chapter 2 explores the theological underpinnings of STL. Chapters 3 through 8 address implications of these theological and theoretical foundations for the ministry of li-

turgical music, exploring the liturgical, pastoral, and musical judgments meant to guide our musical decision-making; the singing of the dialogues and of the acclamations; the role of the responsorial psalm; the singing of the proper entrance and communion chants; and the selecting of vernacular songs for use in the liturgy. Chapters 9 through 11 offer processes for selecting music with the liturgical year in mind, for building a repertoire of seasonal sets of service music, and for choosing a parish music resource. Chapter 12 deals with the relationship between music and silence, with the need for silence in the liturgy, and with pastoral ways to help ourselves and those to whom we minister grow in meeting this need. Chapter 13 presents a paschal mystery spirituality for ministers of music.

What is missing in this small book is readily available in many resources written by other pastoral, liturgical musicians who are teachers and scholars. I am grateful to each of them for their “bits and pieces” as I hope they—and you, the reader of this volume—will be grateful for mine. Bon appétit!



# 1

## Liturgy and the Paschal Mystery

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 6:3-5, NRSV)*

The reality of our immersion through baptism in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is at the heart of our Christian identity and of our daily Christian living. It is the central mystery made present every time we gather for liturgical celebration. But what is this mystery of dying and rising in Christ? How do we define it? Where do we encounter it? Most importantly, how do we surrender ourselves to it?

### Defining the Paschal Mystery

The paschal mystery is simply the choice to surrender our will to the will of God. Such choice always requires a dying to self, an emptying of self, a giving of self. And it always results in deeper, freer, more redeemed life.

We very easily see this as the mystery of Christ's life, but not so easily as the mystery of our own life. But this is exactly what Paul invites us to see: that the mystery of baptism is precisely the uniting of our dying and rising with that of Christ. The paschal mystery defines our life as much as it defined Christ's. This means that the paschal mystery is not a past event but a present one. The paschal mystery defines the very way we live our lives. We participate with Christ in this mystery and in doing so we collaborate with him in bringing about redemption for the whole world.

We can understand more about this mystery by examining how it was present in Jesus' life. For one thing, the mystery of dying and rising encompassed the entirety of his life, not just the moments of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The mystery encompassed Mary and her *yes* to a very difficult, painful, and challenging request on the part of God. The mystery continued in Jesus' own willingness to be formed by Mary and Joseph in faith, values, and behavior. It was present in his continual encounters with the sick, the suffering, the poor and the hungry, in his struggles and frustrations with his disciples, and in his ongoing confrontations with the Pharisees. In every situation, at every moment, Jesus chose to give himself over so that God's plan of salvation for the world might be fulfilled.

We, too, encounter the paschal mystery most immediately in the ordinary living of daily life, in the ordinary demands of what it means to live consciously as faithful followers of Christ. Often we are not aware of the paschal mystery potential of ordinary daily life because we mistakenly equate the paschal mystery only with dramatic death-resurrection events. But, as we have been pointing out, the mystery of dying to self and rising to new life in Christ is ongoing and ordinary. It comes to us in the faces of family members, in the situations at work, and in the neighbor knocking on our door.

### **Liturgy as Ritual Participation in the Paschal Mystery**

We also encounter the paschal mystery in its ritual enactment in the liturgy. Every time we gather for liturgy we are the

church visibly united in communal surrender to this dying and rising mystery that defines our lives. Within and through the rite we surrender as one body to this redemptive mystery and undergo transformation to deeper identity as Body of Christ and more conscious participation in his mission. In every liturgical celebration God acts to transform us and we surrender to that transformation by choosing to pass through the doorway of death to new life. Christ leads the way through his own act of self-surrender to the mystery of dying and rising. We follow by choosing—fully, actively, consciously—to surrender ourselves to this paschal mystery as it unfolds within the liturgical rite and, by consequence, in the demands of our daily lives.

This understanding of liturgy is revolutionary, for it turns our minds and hearts around. We turn from a limited sense of ourselves as individual persons to awareness of who we are together as Body of Christ. We turn from seeking the self-satisfaction of a “feel-good” liturgy to the self-giving of the paschal mystery. We turn from the mistaken notion that our efforts determine the outcome of the liturgy to the realization that God, who initiates what happens in the ritual and brings about its completion, is the primary actor in the liturgy.

This understanding of liturgy is also radical, for it demands participation from us on the level of our very being. We move through all the doing—the gathering, the processing, the listening, the responding, the singing, the receiving—to becoming more fully who we are: the Body of Christ giving ourselves for the life of the world. Full, conscious, active participation in the liturgy is full, conscious, active participation in the deepest mystery of who we are: the community of the church surrendering ourselves to the paschal mystery.

## **Liturgical Music and the Paschal Mystery**

Grasping that liturgy is ritual enactment of the paschal mystery clarifies our understanding of the role music is meant to play in the liturgy. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy identifies

music as a “necessary or integral part” of the liturgy (112). The role of music, then, is to contribute in a fundamental way to liturgy’s enactment of the paschal mystery. The role of music is to help us surrender to the paschal mystery as it unfolds within the rite. The role of music is not to entertain, not to keep us “interested” when the rite seems dry. The music is not an end in itself but a means to our renewal of identity as Body of Christ. How specifically does music contribute to the liturgical enactment of the paschal mystery? In what way does singing engage us in the mystery of dying and rising in Christ that the liturgy is ritualizing? Part of the answer lies in the nature of music itself. The other part lies in our free choice as members of the assembly.

### *The Nature of Music*

Music is by nature an encounter between force and resistance. This is so because all sound, no matter what its quality, volume, or duration, is the result of a force meeting a resistance—the push of wind against tree leaves, for example, or the striking of hammer against piano strings, or the rush of water against stones in a creek bed. With singing this force-resistance encounter begins where our breath pushes against the vocal folds in our larynx. This is a natural dynamic, one in which we unconsciously engage every time we sing. And it is personal: this is our own body acting out of natural force-resistance mechanisms. Whenever we sing with others, however, the force-resistance dynamic occurring within us also operates *among* us. As our individualized voices struggle to become one voice the force of our own personalities meets the resistance of all the other personalities in the room, and vice versa. All of our resistances to one another—our competitiveness, envy, jealousy, resentment, desire to dominate, and so on—collide with the force of the singing itself calling us beyond self-centeredness to common purpose and common identity.

When our singing together is within the context of the liturgy, this encounter of force and resistance becomes an embodiment of our ritual enactment of the paschal mystery. The force is simply the movement of grace urging us to surrender our resistance

to becoming one body in Christ. There is a dying to self called for here and each time we choose to undergo it, we rise to a new state of consciousness as Body of Christ where all barriers between self and others have been removed. We become Body of Christ united in common force against all the resistances in the human heart that impede the movement of the Spirit toward salvation of the world.

This communal surrender to our identity as Body of Christ does not happen, however, without some resistance on our part, and this is part of the mystery of redemption. Just as there can be no singing without physical resistance in the larynx, so there can be no authentic surrender to the paschal mystery without some resistance on our part. The marvel is that the paschal mystery does not obliterate our resistance to dying to self but uses it to enable the very surrender that is required. Truly life rises from death. And the very activity of our singing together liturgically embodies this mystery and enables this transformation.

### *Our Free Choice*

A second part of the answer to the question about how music enables our ritual enactment of the paschal mystery lies within our own hearts, for to join the liturgical assembly in song is to make a choice. The very choice to sing is a revelation of our personal will and intention to engage with the Body of Christ in the ritual enactment of our dying and rising. None of us ever comes to liturgy without resistance; this is the natural human condition. As pointed out above, this resistance is in fact the very stuff that makes our surrender possible. The call of the liturgy is to do the surrendering and by its very nature communal singing facilitates this choice even while we are resisting it. We may not always be conscious of this movement of surrender to the paschal mystery, but we are often conscious of the sense of release, of “giving over” to something beyond ourselves, which such singing generates.

The more aware we become of liturgical singing as participation in the dying and rising mystery that the liturgy enacts,

the more readily we can allow our singing to facilitate our surrender to this mystery. We will sing, then, not just because we enjoy this particular song or this particular setting of the Mass, but because we want to enter with the assembled church into the dying and rising mystery that marks our identity. Then our communal singing will become a revelation not of the beauty of the music itself, or of the musical capability of this particular community, but of something far deeper: the transformation of this community into the dying and rising Body of Christ.

*What* we sing in liturgy, then, is our identity as Body of Christ called to paschal mystery living. Liturgical singing, by the power of the dynamics written into its nature, facilitates our entering into this identity. *Why* we sing is so that we may become more fully the Body of Christ open to God's ritual transformation of us, open to one another as members of the church, and open to allowing the paschal mystery to shape our self-understanding and our way of living.

## 2

# Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship

## The Underlying Theology

In 2007 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL), replacing the previous documents guiding liturgical music, *Music in Catholic Worship*<sup>1</sup> and its companion *Liturgical Music Today*.<sup>2</sup> STL reiterates much of what the earlier documents contained, strengthens some guidelines, nuances others to fit what has become standard liturgical music practice in the United States, addresses some aberrations that have crept into practice, and walks the same careful line between the ongoing contention over what music (Gregorian chant or the religious song of a given culture) and what language (Latin or the vernacular) is best suited to liturgical celebration. Underpinning the document as a whole is a remarkable theology. This chapter explores this theology, expanding on it with further reflections, and raising some critical questions for applying this theology to the pastoral practice of liturgical music.

### Liturgical Singing Comes from God

“God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes

its source” (STL 1). God gives us song so that it might lead us beyond our earthbound selves to higher realms (STL 2). Song begins, then, as the gift of a God who loves us into greater being.

We generally think of music as a human creation, but STL suggests the actual creator of song is God. In God’s design, we are the object of song rather than its subject. We become its subject only when we use song to sing back our love to the God who first loves us and sings within us. The music that is a sign of our love for God begins as a sign of God’s prior love and longing for us. We sing because the God who loves us has made us to do so.

We see this love in action in the marvelous second account of creation in the book of Genesis. God takes clay from the ground, shapes it into a human body, then blows divine breath into its nostrils to give the first human being life (Gen 2:7). This blowing of divine breath into the human body was perhaps the first song to fill the universe. Or perhaps we can say that the human being became God’s musical instrument. Living and breathing divine life, this human being has been making music ever since.

Reflecting on God’s gift of breath and song leads to the realization that everything we are and everything we do comes not from us but from God. We do not generate who we are, what we have, or what we do; all is gift from the One who holds nothing in reserve. Such giving, in fact, defines the very nature of the Trinity: three Persons who exist as everlasting and ongoing self-gift to one another and whose self-giving explodes into the everlasting and ongoing creation of the cosmos.

Do we realize that song comes not from ourselves but from God who dwells within us and loves us into being? Do we realize that our ability to express our love for God through song comes not from ourselves but from God who first loves us? Do we realize that our singing during the liturgy is an activity of love?

### **Liturgical Singing Is God’s Self-Revelation**

“Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises” (STL 1, referencing 1 Cor 3:16-17). Liturgical

singing is not our self-expression but God's Self-expression in and through us. What God expresses in our song is the mystery of life given for the sake of the other. This mystery is most fully revealed in the "song" of Jesus on the cross: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). In an act of ultimate self-offering, Jesus gives the Father back the breath given him at birth. In trinitarian terms he returns the Spirit continually given him by the Father. Every time we celebrate the liturgy we enter ritually into this mystery of the cross: we join our self-offering to the self-offering of Jesus. We express this self-offering through our singing because this is the way we give our spirit-breath back to the God who first gave it to us. This self-gift is not generated by us, however, but is instigated by God who gives us the Spirit and a body-soul created to sing. Even our self-giving is not self-expression, then, but is God's Self-revelation in and through us.

Since singing is not human self-revelation but Self-revelation of God, our singing needs to be an act of self-emptying so that God can give Godself to us and reshape us according to the divine life poured into us. What a paradox: song that naturally increases self-awareness, expands bodily presence, and fills surrounding space with self-expression is, within the context of liturgical celebration, actually a self-emptying.

Liturgical singing, then, is meant to be an activity of self-emptying. We must ask ourselves, however, if this is in fact so. How do we discern the difference between singing that serves self and singing that gives self away? When is our liturgical singing actually a form of self-coronation, and what must we do to reorient our will and intention when this is so?

## **Liturgical Singing Is Sacramental**

Because song is God's gift to us, God is present to us whenever we sing God's praise (STL 1). "[I]t is no wonder that singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people" (STL 2). Moreover, when we sing we make ourselves present to one another as the community

of the church (STL 2). Our liturgical singing is a sacramental sign of God's presence within and among us and of our presence to and union with one another as Body of Christ. This principle that outward signs reveal inward grace is at the core of Roman Catholic sacramental theology (STL 6). Liturgical singing is sacramental because it makes God's love for us and our interior response of self-gift to God and to one another physically present.

When we sing liturgically, then, far more goes on than the mere production of musical sounds. The song generated by vibrations within our body is revelation of the unseen vibration of God's presence within us. The vibrations our body-song generate in physical space become revelation of that presence to the other bodies peopling that space. Our song vibrations reveal the interiority of both the deep presence of God within us and our choice to make that presence known to others.

How can we engage in liturgical singing in such a way that it deepens our awareness of the presence of God within us? What space do we need to create within ourselves in order to receive this presence? How can we make our singing a revelation of God's presence to others in the assembly? What space do we need to create within and among ourselves for this to happen?

### **Liturgical Singing Binds the Body of Christ**

“By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension” (STL 2). Communal liturgical singing generates a shared resonance that binds us together as the community of Christ. On a perceptible level, the physical vibrations each person sends out into the surrounding space enter the bodies of every other person in that space. Multiple sound waves interpenetrate to create a synchronized sound. The singing binds persons together in a reciprocity of resonance. More is bound together than bodies and bone, however. On an imperceptible level, the singing of each individual reveals a choice to give self over to the demands of the rite.

The unseen will and intention of each individual becomes audible and impacts, through the physical vibration of communal liturgical singing, the will and intention of every other person. We become the one Body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

One outcome of this shared resonance of will and intention is that those strong in faith support those who are weak (STL 5). Those within the assembly who feel doubt or diffidence are embraced by the shared resonance of the rest of the community singing its faith and commitment. On days when our faith is wavering or marginal, those whose will and intention is sure and strong carry us, and vice versa. The compassion and care the liturgy calls each of us to show the world begin already during the liturgy itself and are made sacramentally present through our singing.

This sharing of will and intention as the one Body of Christ is not automatic or magical, however. We must choose it. Are we aware of all the members of the assembly when we sing, or are we focused only on ourselves? Do we feel compassion for those in the assembly who are struggling with faith and do we offer our voice in song as a means of uplift and support? Do we sing wholeheartedly when we ourselves feel disconnected from God or from the liturgical action, so that our singing can unleash layers of will and intention buried beneath more surface levels of consciousness? When we feel this way, are we grateful for the others who embrace us with their gift of faith-filled singing? Are we aware that whether embracing others with our song or letting ourselves be embraced by theirs, we are engaging in the self-emptying that characterizes authentic liturgical singing? Are we willing to abandon the preoccupation with self this requires?

### **Liturgical Singing Celebrates the Paschal Mystery**

“The primordial song of the Liturgy is the canticle of victory over sin and death” (STL 7), the canticle of the paschal mystery that death undertaken out of self-giving love yields new and fuller life. Every celebration of liturgy is a ritual enactment of the

paschal mystery in which we unite ourselves with the self-offering of Christ and are filled with the new life that communion with him and with one another brings. In this ritual enactment we confront head-on that we must die to self in order to receive this new life. In order to be filled by God with God's own life we must empty ourselves.

So, like Christ, ours is a song of self-emptying. But our song of self-emptying is also one of unimaginable fulfillment. Our self-emptying makes room for the God who from the beginning of time has never ceased to make room for us. We are taken up into the life of the Trinity (STL 10). The self-giving that our liturgical singing reveals and expresses is simply response to the God who has first given Self to us. Where is the sting in such death?

Do we believe in our victory through Christ over sin and death? Does our liturgical singing express not only this belief but also our willingness to undergo the dying to self that is required? How does this dying to self occur in our actual singing during a given liturgical celebration? Do we use our singing to give ourselves away to God and to others, or do we use it to fill ourselves with ourselves? On the other hand, what experiences of new and deeper life have come to us when we have truly given ourselves over to God and others through our liturgical singing? What does this new life feel like? How can we share it with others?

### **Liturgical Singing Propels Us to Mission**

“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. The words Jesus chose from the book of Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry become the song of the Body of Christ” (STL 8, referencing *Gaudium et Spes* 1).

The gift of song that flows from God to each of us, and from each of us to one another as Body of Christ, now flows from the

Body of Christ to the body of the world. Song that is given so we might offer God praise is also given so we might offer care and compassion to our neighbor. The song that sacramentalizes our love for God and our union with one another also sacramentalizes our mission to the world.

Just as our liturgical singing is not self-generated, neither is it self-serving: “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” (STL 9). We do not sing to entertain ourselves, or to satisfy ourselves, or to become bloated with a sense of self. Rather, we sing so that we might march together with greater courage and conviction into the melee of the world where injustice, violence, poverty, oppression, and division fracture the body of humankind. Emboldened by the paschal mystery song of the Body of Christ, we gather these fragmented parts into the healing embrace of Christ. With Christ, we sing over the world. With Christ, we become God’s song for the world, willingly emptying ourselves so that God’s melody may blow where it will, bringing life.

Authentic liturgical singing enables us to participate fully, consciously, and actively not only in the liturgy but also in the life of the world as agents of salvation. In both liturgy and living such participation is challenging, “[but] 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” (STL 14).

Does our liturgical singing in fact do this? If so, how? If not, why?

# 3

## Making Musical Choices

### Three Judgments, One Evaluation

*Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL) reiterates the three judgments—liturgical, pastoral, and musical—introduced in *Music in Catholic Worship* to guide our musical decision-making, and reaffirms that these judgments are but three aspects of one evaluation (STL 126–36). Although these judgments are to be treated holistically, in pastoral practice they are sometimes pitted against one another. The three judgments do not stand in hierarchical relationship but in tension with one another as check-and-balance (STL 126). Together they provide a flexible framework for musical decision-making that is solidly based on the nature of the liturgy, on sensitivity to the community gathered for worship, and on the role music is to play in drawing the assembly into the paschal mystery being celebrated. Those of us engaged in liturgical music recognize immediately that this threefold judgment embraces exactly the tensions we experience in our ministry. By reaffirming that our musical decision-making must arise from an interaction of liturgical, pastoral, and musical discernments, STL frees us from falling prey to one-sided thinking.

The liturgical judgment helps us discern whether a given piece of music is “capable of meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth by the liturgical books for this particular rite”

(STL 127). This judgment challenges us to be conversant with the liturgical books and with the rites, and to understand the flow of each rite and the interaction of its different parts. On a more significant level, this judgment challenges us to grasp the underlying dynamic of the rite, that is, how its “surface structure” (what we see, hear, taste, and touch) reveals its “deep structure” (the unfolding of the paschal mystery). How easy it is to stop at the “surface structure,” making sure, for example, that all the music is done according to liturgical norms, and never give ourselves over to the paschal mystery demands of the rite. We can hide behind the rubrics (and even feel proud about it). So, while the liturgical judgment is objective, verified by guidelines in liturgical documents and rubrics in liturgical books, this judgment is also very personal. It passes judgment on *us*, and our willingness to participate consciously and fully in the liturgy through the music.

The pastoral judgment enables us to discern whether a given piece or style or genre of music will draw the assembly members “closer to the holy mysteries being celebrated” (STL 130). This judgment is perhaps the most difficult to decipher because it requires assessing whether a particular piece or form or style of music can enable a particular assembly to surrender to ritual enactment of the paschal mystery. It requires ongoing assessment of who the members of this assembly are in terms of culture, language, education, age, experience, and so forth, and of how they understand and enter into music. No matter how beautiful or how flawlessly rendered, music that is unintelligible or inaccessible to a given assembly cannot enable ritual surrender to the paschal mystery. On the other hand, accessible music that moves the assembly, even in religious ways, might not be capable of eliciting this surrender either. The question here is not whether the people are being moved by the music, but *how* they are being moved. As with the liturgical judgment, the pastoral judgment has personal implications for those of us who choose and lead the music. Each of us must continually ask ourselves, am I willing to let the music lead me to deeper participation in the paschal mystery?

“The musical judgment asks whether this composition has the necessary aesthetic qualities that can bear the weight of the mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy. . . . Is this composition technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy?” (STL 134). Making this judgment, STL points out, requires musical competency. This means parishes and dioceses need to hire music directors who are trained in both music and liturgy. Many implications follow for us who are music directors. We must be competent in what we know and willing to learn what we do not know. We must continually grow in our musical and liturgical expertise. We must increase our knowledge of the culturally and linguistically diverse genres of music today’s assemblies bring to the liturgical celebration. We must hone our ability to evaluate the musical merits of each genre, and assess the power of each to draw people into the deeper dimensions of the liturgical action.

The role of the music is both to reveal the mystery of Christ being celebrated (a liturgical judgment) and to enable the gathered community to participate in that mystery (a pastoral judgment). The music itself must possess the aesthetic and technical qualities needed to fulfill this dual role (a musical judgment). When we find ourselves confronted, for example, with lack of liturgical understanding on the part of the people in the pews, when we are fatigued by the unending effort liturgical formation requires, when we are buffeted by an unending stream of liturgically inappropriate musical requests, we easily feel tempted to misapply the pastoral judgment and select music that entertains the people and provides only a surface level of satisfaction. At these times, the liturgical judgment reminds us that the ultimate purpose of the music is to draw the people into the rite in such a way that they can surrender themselves more fully to God’s action. When it feels easier to offer people simplistic music to sing rather than to challenge them to grow in their musical skill and understanding, our musical judgment reminds us that a diet of simplistic music will ultimately condemn the people to a shallow and immature spirituality. The liturgical and musical judgments remind us that being pastoral means more than being sensitive

to “where the people are”; it also means helping them move forward. At the same time the pastoral judgment reminds us that selecting music that is inaccessible to a particular community, whether because of style, language, or technical complexity, also impedes the people’s ability to give themselves over to the liturgy. The three judgments must work together.

We also know from experience that the interaction of the three judgments moves along a continuum. We need to keep shifting the balance among them as our assemblies change, as their liturgical understanding grows, as new music becomes available, and as we ourselves move from serving one liturgical community to serving another.

Applying this threefold evaluation requires knowledge and understanding of the liturgy (its purpose, its parts, its structure, its internal dynamics), knowledge and understanding of music, and knowledge and understanding of the particular people who will be gathering to celebrate the liturgy. Mastering any one of these areas is indeed a huge and unending challenge. To meet this challenge, the best starting point is the liturgical foundation laid down in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that every time we gather to celebrate liturgy we enact the paschal mystery lying at the heart of our identity and mission as the Body of Christ (5–6). The three judgments are but one evaluation: What music will enable this assembly gathered on this day in this space at this time to enter fully, consciously, and actively into this enactment of who they are and how they are to live?

# 4

## Singing the Dialogues

Following the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM)<sup>1</sup> 40, which states that preference is to be given to those parts “sung by the Priest or the Deacon or a reader, with the people replying, or by the priest and people together,” *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL) directs, “Every effort should therefore be made to introduce or strengthen as a normative practice the singing of the dialogues between the priest, deacon, or lector and the people” (115a).<sup>2</sup> Learning to sing these dialogues raises the bar for many assemblies. Musical education and liturgical formation will be required, as well as judicious expenditure of time and energy. We need to assess the capability of our presiders, deacons, and assemblies to sing these dialogues. Can our liturgical community successfully implement this directive? With which dialogues ought we to begin? How ought we to begin?

### Why Sing the Dialogues

The starting point for answering these pastoral questions is to consider the value of singing the dialogues. What happens in the liturgical celebration when these dialogues are sung? What happens to the assembly’s sense of itself as participants in the rite?

GIRM 34 (and STL 115a) tells us the significance of the dialogues. The dialogues are a sacramental revelation of the

communal nature of the liturgy. The dialogues draw us into the rite as shared liturgical prayer. Singing them moves us from being separate individuals engaged in private prayer to being a liturgical assembly gathered for communal celebration of the paschal mystery of Christ.

The dialogues “foster and bring about communion” between the ordained leader of the liturgy and the people gathered for the celebration (GIRM 34; STL 115a). Singing the dialogues embodies the hierarchical structure of the liturgy that arises from the hierarchical nature of the relationship of Christ to the church. The leader of every liturgical celebration is Christ, the Head of his Mystical Body (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 7). In the place of Christ, the presiding priest initiates the celebration, moves it forward, and brings it to conclusion. The presiding priest represents the first among the members of the Body of Christ to go where Christ leads in the celebration, that is, to the altar of self-giving, to the breaking open of the Word that requires the breaking open of one’s life, to the transformation of self that leads to laying down one’s life for the good of others. Our communion with the presider, and the presider’s communion with us, deepens our communion with Christ. Bound together, we celebrate the ritual renewal of our identity and mission as the one Body of Christ, the church.

By singing the dialogues we take our rightful ownership of the celebration as baptized members of the Body of Christ. As liturgical texts, the dialogues constitute the rite; singing the dialogues constitutes who we are when gathered for liturgical celebration. We are the community of the Body of Christ actively participating in the unfolding of the rite. We are the community of the baptized actively making visible the true nature of the church and the mystery of redemption (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 2).

## **Implementing Singing the Dialogues**

Begin by identifying the dialogues. The dialogues are interactions between presider or deacon and the gathered assembly.

They include the opening greeting, several iterations of “The Lord be with you”—“And with your spirit,” the “Pray, brethren . . .” concluding the preparation of the gifts, the preface dialogue, and the final blessing and dismissal. Unlike the acclamations, in which the assembly addresses God or Christ, the dialogues are assembly responses to the ordained ministers who are leading the celebration. They are ritual elements that bind head and members into one body enacting the rite.

Next, develop consensus among pastor, music director, and parish liturgy committee about why and how to introduce the parish to the practice of singing the dialogues. Talk together about how these elements constitute the rite, how they both foster and create the communion of the Body of Christ at worship, and why singing them is important. Plan together the process of formation needed to help parishioners understand the nature and the importance of the dialogues and why they will be singing them. Finally, identify problems you might face in implementing this practice and plan ways to address these potential difficulties. The more specific and proactive you are in proceeding, the more successful you will be.

Next, identify where to begin. With which dialogues will you begin? Perhaps the best starting point might be “The Lord be with you”—“And with your spirit” because it occurs so frequently in the rite. Or perhaps the best beginning might be with the greeting, which begins Mass, and the dismissal, which concludes the celebration. Once you have decided your starting point, determine what will be needed to help your presiders and deacons become comfortable and confident singing their parts.<sup>3</sup> Then plan your process for teaching your assemblies how to sing their part.

### **What We Gain by Singing the Dialogues**

One gain from singing the dialogues will be discovery of an unarticulated but central aspect of the church’s vision of the liturgy as musical. Despite our culture’s intimations to the

contrary, singing the liturgy does not require advanced musical training, operatic skill, or American Idol performance style. It does not require complex melodies or intricate harmonizations. It requires only ordinary human voices singing simple unaccompanied texts with love. This we all can do.

Another gain from singing dialogues that constitute the rite will be renewed focus on the core of the liturgy. Vocal solos as “communion meditations” and prolonged singing of praise and worship music before Mass begins will then be seen more clearly as peripheral, even sidetracks. As prayerful as these musical performances may be, they do not in themselves lead us into the liturgical prayer necessary for ritual participation in the paschal mystery. The dialogues do.

Finally, we will be fulfilling the intent of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that “sacred music is to be considered the more holy, the more closely connected it is with the liturgical action” (112). The holiness of liturgical music does not reside in its musical form or style but in its capacity to support our ritual surrender of self to becoming more perfectly the Body of Christ given for the life of the world. There is a bare simplicity about this, a humble nakedness before God and one another that is made most effectively evident in the simple singing of the rite. We don’t need huge musical forces or elaborate musical settings in order to surrender ourselves. We just need ourselves and our voices as we are.

Implementing the singing of the dialogues deserves serious attention. It will revolutionize our musical decision-making and our musical practice. As with all revolutions, change will be slow and some things will have to die in order for new things to be born. But this revolution is not new; we are simply taking another important step down the road of liturgical renewal.

# 5

## Singing the Acclamations

We easily identify the gospel acclamation; the Holy, Holy, Holy; the mystery of faith and the Great Amen as acclamations. But the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* also identifies the people's "Amen" to the presidential prayers (opening collect, the prayer over the offerings, and the prayer after Communion) as an acclamation (GIRM 54, 89, 146). GIRM also calls "The word of the Lord"—"Thanks be to God" after the first and second readings an acclamation (128, 130), as well as the responses both before and after the gospel proclamation (60, 134). Finally, GIRM names the doxology that concludes the Our Father an acclamation (153).

GIRM states that the acclamations constitute a "level of active participation that is to be made by the assembled faithful in every form of the Mass, so that the action of the whole community may be clearly expressed and fostered" (35). Through the "Amen" we take ownership of the prayers and give our personal assent to them (54, 89). Through the acclamations surrounding the gospel we acknowledge Christ present and acting in the proclamation (60). Through the acclamations intrinsic to the eucharistic prayer we join in the proclamation of the story of salvation and offer ourselves together with Christ to the Father (78–79). *Sing to the Lord* (STL) adds that the acclamations "arise from the whole gathered assembly as assents to God's Word and

action” (115a). Such directives invite us to take a deeper look at the nature of the acclamations and their function in the rite.

## **What the Acclamations Are**

The acclamations are not dialogues, but creedal professions of faith addressed directly to God or Christ. In a dialogue such as “The Lord be with you”—“And with your spirit” our response is directed to the minister who initiates the dialogue. In an acclamation, our response, although initiated by some invitation, prayer, or prior acclamation by presider, lector, or deacon, is directed toward God or Christ. The “Amen” that concludes the presidential prayers and the eucharistic prayer is our participation in the direct address of these prayers to God. The acclamations that conclude the first and second readings are our shouts of thanksgiving to God for the saving word spoken to us. The acclamations that surround the proclamation of the gospel—“Glory to you, Lord” and “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”—are direct addresses to Christ, Word of God present and speaking to us. In the eucharistic prayer, the Holy, Holy, Holy is addressed to the Father; the mystery of faith is addressed to the risen Christ; and the Great Amen is sung to the Trinity.

The acclamations are our highest mode of priestly participation in the eucharistic celebration because they are forms of direct address to God. Sometimes we address God as Father, other times as Christ, but always as the giver of redemption and the initiator of this here-and-now liturgical action. In the acclamations we clearly acknowledge our baptismal identity as Body of Christ. We take up the full maturity of the dignity and power bestowed upon us. We speak directly to God not as slaves or servants, but as daughters and sons collaborating in the mutual self-surrender that is the core of redemption and the wellspring of its power.

Through the acclamations we take up our baptismal ownership of the rite. Our “Amen” that concludes the opening collect, for example, is not an arbitrary tagalong but an essential part of

the prayer. The collect begins with a moment of silence during which we individually raise our hearts and intentions to God. The presider then “collects” these silent prayers into a communal one that he voices on the community’s behalf. Our “Amen” is our affirmation of this common prayer, our acknowledgment that we are the one Body of Christ gathered in petition before the all-redeeming God, our ownership of our priesthood in Christ and with one another. Our “Amen” is no small thing, no merely murmured second thought, no perfunctory period to someone else’s prayer. It is ownership of the prayer and participation in the ecclesial identity from which the prayer arises.

This “Amen” parallels the Great Amen that concludes the eucharistic prayer, the high point and climax of the entire rite (GIRM 30, 78). Like the collect, the eucharistic prayer is the prayer of all of us who with the presider “join with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice” (GIRM 78). We participate in this great prayer through both silence and acclamation. In other words, we are to listen not halfheartedly or semiconsciously, but with inflamed hearts fully engaged. We shout “Amen” to the reality that we are the ones offering and being offered, we are the ones being transformed more fully into the Body of Christ, we are the ones being given with Christ for the life of the world (GIRM 95).

## **A Spirituality Engendered by the Acclamations**

All liturgical spirituality—including the spirituality of liturgical singing—comes from living the paschal mystery call of our baptismal identity as Body of Christ. The acclamations are acts of liturgical self-possession that realize our baptismal identity and mission. When we sing the acclamations we take ownership of ourselves. When we sing the acclamations we learn that all prayer, whether cries for help, or pleas for healing, or confessions of sin, or words of thanksgiving, stands upon our baptismal right to address God face-to-face. When we sing the acclamations we dare the one gesture forbidden mere mortals—to look directly

upon the face of God—and discover in that act not our death but our dignity.

Once we understand what we are doing ritually in the acclamations, we can never again look upon self or others in a demeaning way, nor can we ever again approach life's challenges with a sense of disempowerment. Instead we see in self and others the dignity bestowed by God and act toward both with reverence and appreciation. And we interpret events, both personal and social, both close at hand and worldwide, not as interventions or judgments of a distant God but as invitations to enlist our power with God's in the mutual work of redemption. In short, we grow to full stature before God and take on our share of responsibility for the coming of the kingdom.

The acclamations engender a spirituality that deepens our sense of identity as daughters and sons given the birthright to speak directly to God. They are the ritual element that most tellingly celebrates our baptismal stance before God as collaborators in the work of redemption. By singing them, we assert our identity as a people called to stand tall, to stand up against evil, to stand forth for justice, and to stand face-to-face with God, aware of our dignity and our empowerment.

## **Singing the Acclamations Well**

### *The Amen to the Presidential Prayers*

Each “Amen” to a presidential prayer occurs at a summary point in the rite: the conclusion of the introductory rites, the conclusion of the preparation of the gifts, and the conclusion of the communion rite. These “Amens” attest to a progressive transformation taking place within us.

The opening collect is the final element of the introductory rites whose purpose has been to enable us to become aware of our communal identity and to open ourselves to hearing the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist together (GIRM 46). The text of the collect is always related to the Sunday or season of the year and the readings of the day (what GIRM 54

calls the “character of the celebration”). In our “Amen” to this prayer we say yes to the work God will do within us during this liturgical celebration. We announce our readiness to enter into whatever transformation of us God will be undertaking. With this “Amen” we declare: We are here and we are ready—so be it!

The prayer over the offerings finalizes our preparation for the eucharistic prayer (GIRM 77). The prayer summarizes our readiness to enter once again into the retelling of the story of our salvation. Through our “Amen” we proclaim: We are the gifts ready for the great prayer of offering and transformation—so be it!

The prayer after Communion petitions God “for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated” (GIRM 89). By our “Amen” we declare: We have become one with Christ and with one another and are ready to bear witness to this with our lives—so be it!

These Amens are acclamatory affirmations of our readiness to enter fully into the transforming power of the rite. They express an incremental self-awareness and ministerial intent: Yes, we are here; Yes, we are ready; Yes, we will be who we are.

Yet how many assemblies merely mumble these Amens as afterthoughts or as parenthetical interjections? What can we do to help them better acclaim these Amen’s? First, the presidential prayers need to be well led. The presider needs to *pray* the text, not merely read it. And he needs to pray the text “musically.” Optimally, this means to sing it, but even a presider who lacks the skill or confidence to sing can render the presidential prayers in a musical way by allowing the natural rhythms and cadences of the texts to guide how they are spoken. An assembly who hears the praying of the presider in these rhythms and cadences will enter into the prayer, and their Amen, sung or spoken, will be the acclamation it is meant to be.

### *Acclamations in the Liturgy of the Word*

The gospel acclamation is “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 by

means of the chant” (GIRM 62). The reservation of the Book of the Gospels for the proclamation of the gospel (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* 36) and the special reverence shown this Book (placed on the altar at the beginning of Mass; carried ceremonially to the ambo; incensed on solemn festivities) further express our belief in this presence of Christ in the gospel proclamation.

The gospel acclamation best fulfills its creedal function when its singing accompanies the elevation of the Book of the Gospels. Unfortunately, GIRM 132 indicates the acclamation is to be sung while the deacon or priest who is to proclaim the gospel is saying his silent prayer of preparation, or while the thurible is being prepared when the Book is to be incensed. This misdirects our attention and skews the purpose of the acclamation. Instead, the singing of the acclamation needs to coincide with the raising of the Book of the Gospels from the altar and to accompany the procession of the Book to the ambo. This is the choreography of song and movement that communicates the relationship between what we are singing and why, and enables the gospel acclamation to fulfill its purpose.

The Liturgy of the Word contains other acclamations as well, such as the “Thanks be to God,” which follows the first and second readings (GIRM 128 and 130). Through them we express our faith in the presence of God as well as our gratitude for the gift of God’s word. Every parish needs to develop a plan for training lectors to sing “The Word of the Lord” and for helping them become comfortable and confident doing so. This includes devising ways to help lectors who might find this practice insurmountably intimidating. If a cantor is to sing this acclamation (STL 37), it means deciding whether the cantor will stand next to the lector at the ambo, off to the side of the ambo, or at a separate cantor stand. It entails setting up practice sessions without assembly present. Finally, it means deciding when you will begin singing this acclamation in the liturgy. If this practice will be new for your parish, applying the principle of progressive solemnity might be wise. Begin by having the lectors sing this

acclamation only during the most important liturgical seasons such as Easter and Christmas. As the practice takes hold among the assembly and the lectors become more confident with it, gradually make singing this acclamation normative for every Sunday and solemnity.

Throughout the entire process, remember two pedagogical principles. First, keep it simple. If using the two-tone melody given in the Roman Missal is intimidating for some lectors, teach them a single tone. Second, move forward slowly. Give sufficient time for the singing of this acclamation to become automatic and full-throated before increasing its use. Be patient and be pastoral.

### *Acclamations in the Eucharistic Prayer*

Through the Holy, Holy, Holy we join the heavenly choir in proclaiming the glory and majesty of God who is sovereign over all things. Through the mystery of faith we acclaim Christ is alive even though he has died and that through his death and resurrection we have been saved.<sup>1</sup> Through the Great Amen, the epitome of our baptismal participation in the priesthood of Christ, we acclaim our resounding “so be it!” to the eucharistic prayer.

Because of the centrality of the eucharistic prayer, the singing of these acclamations is of primary importance. We need to help our assemblies sing them spontaneously, confidently, and with full voice. One musical principle is to be consistent in the musical setting we use for them so that the people know what to expect. The best way to do that is to pair specific settings with specific seasons of the liturgical year. Select one, for example, that fits the celebratory mood of Easter and reserve it for use only during that season. Select another that suits the somber mood of Lent and do the same. You will not only be assisting your assembly to sing these acclamations with spontaneity and assurance, but you will also be helping them to enter the season more fully (see chap. 10 for a more detailed discussion of this point). A second musical practice is to communicate “the ritual unity of the Eucharistic Prayer” by adhering to a stylistic musical unity in the acclamations (STL 178).

Finally, there is the pastoral need to teach our parish communities the significance of the eucharistic prayer. We need to begin with educating ourselves as musical leaders by pursuing questions such as these: Why is the eucharistic prayer the climax and center of the entire liturgy? To whom is this prayer addressed? By whom? What happens to us as we pray it? Why does GIRM 78 direct that we listen to this prayer “with reverence and in silence”? How might we do so?

### *Doxology to the Lord’s Prayer*

This doxology, taken from the second-century church document known as the *Didache*, has long been the tradition in most Eastern churches and among Protestants. Whenever we sing the Our Father, we certainly need to sing the doxology that completes it. The setting we use should not musically overshadow or compete with the eucharistic prayer acclamations. Moreover, the setting needs to be accessible to every member of the assembly. The Roman Missal provides us with three chanted settings, including the well-known version assemblies across the United States have sung for many years.

## **The Acclamations and the Mission of the Church**

Singing the acclamations is an outcome of Vatican II’s call for the full, conscious, active participation of all the faithful in the liturgical rite by reason of their baptismal priesthood. The acclamations are *actions* in the form of song. We sing these actions because music by nature augments two modes of presence activated by sound. The first mode of presence is the source of the sound, its identifiable origin. The second mode of presence is the self-awareness we experience when the sound encircles us. The sound of singing makes us aware of the personal presence that is generating the singing. The sound waves instigated by this singing embrace us, both inside and out, and make us aware of ourselves as receiving bodies. When we are both the source and the recipient of the sound, as we are when we engage

in communal liturgical singing, both these modes of presence are greatly intensified. Moreover, our sense of shared personal presence is also intensified. We experience ourselves as part of the one worshipping body.

When we sing the acclamations, then, we become more aware of ourselves and of one another; we become more deeply participative, and more powerfully effective. When we sing the acclamations, we not only address God, we also embrace one another as Body of Christ, and direct personal support to one another in living out our mission as the church. When we sing the acclamations, the sound moves out from each of us as individual source, encircles all of us in mutual support, and sends us as community on mission.

The singing of the acclamations is neither neutral nor inconsequential. We need to spend more time and energy teaching our assemblies to sing the acclamations (and the dialogues) than we spend teaching them new songs and hymns. As part of this focus, you might, for example, institute a regular “Liturgical Music” paragraph in the weekly bulletin. You might begin, for example, with a blurb like this:

The most important parts we sing during Mass are the acclamations. The acclamations are short statements of faith and of assent. The first one we sing is the Gospel Acclamation, our “Alleluia” response to the presence of Christ in the gospel. When we sing it, we profess our belief in his presence and renew our commitment to listen to his Word and let it shape our lives.

You might follow-up with this blurb the second week:

During the Eucharistic Prayer we sing an acclamation called the Mystery of Faith. The text we are currently singing is, “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.” The text is short and to the point. The melody is energetic, uplifting, easy to remember and sing. When we sing it, we are affirming our belief in Christ and recommitting ourselves to participate with him in the mystery of his death and resurrection.

During subsequent weeks, write about the other acclamations. Keep each statement brief. Communicate just one concept at a time, and repeat it often.

The more you do to help your assembly understand the importance of the acclamations and why we are to sing them, the more you will deepen both their participation in the liturgy and their living out of their mission as the church, the Body of Christ. You can do no greater musical work.

# 6

## Singing the Responsorial Psalm

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* tells us that the responsorial psalm “is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word” carrying “great liturgical and pastoral importance” because it “fosters meditation on the Word of God” (GIRM 61). This chapter explores developing understandings about the role of the responsorial psalm in the Liturgy of the Word, then suggests some liturgical and pastoral principles for selecting musical settings of the psalm and for implementing the singing of the responsorial psalm.

### The Role of the Responsorial Psalm

At the time of the promulgation of the revised Lectionary in 1970, Peter Purdue stated that the responsorial psalm is “*the* response of the people to the word of God they hear in all three readings.”<sup>1</sup> Purdue based this claim on the fact that a chain of relationship runs from the first reading through the psalm to the gospel. The first reading was chosen to be proclaimed with the gospel of the day because it provided some thematic resonance, or some contrast, or some Hebrew Testament background, or some prophetic foreshadowing. The verses of a particular psalm were then deliberately selected to relate to the first reading. When we approach the first reading, psalm, and gospel of a

given Sunday, as an integrated set their interrelationship becomes evident. When we sing the responsorial psalm, then, we are responding to the gospel as well as to the first reading.<sup>2</sup>

Scripture scholar and musician Irene Nowell provides specific insight into the relationship of the responsorial psalm to the entire Liturgy of the Word.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Ralph Keifer's comment that "the Responsorial Psalm constitutes a summation of the word for that day,"<sup>4</sup> Nowell shows how the juxtaposition of a particular psalm with a particular set of readings generates meanings and connections within a particular Liturgy of the Word. Moreover, she points out that the responsorial psalm is the avenue not only to understanding the whole of the Liturgy of the Word but also to appropriating its meaning for our lives. As poetry, the psalms move us beyond the hearing of a discursive text to entering into the text as our own personal experience. The responsorial psalm is both the key that unlocks the meaning of the Liturgy of the Word and the doorway by which we enter into and internalize that meaning.

Jean-Pierre Prévost, former professor of Hebrew at St. Paul University, Ottawa, once said that the role of the responsorial psalm is to act as the bridge between the first reading and the gospel. This image accords with the principle in the Lectionary that the end point or climax of the Liturgy of the Word is the gospel reading for which the preceding elements prepare us (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* 13). The image of the responsorial psalm as bridge conveys a paradoxical sense of both movement and stability. The movement aspect of the metaphor implies that we begin the Liturgy of the Word in one place and cross over to another. There is a journey here. Where does it begin? Where does it end? Where are we—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, liturgically—at the start of the Liturgy of the Word? Where are we at its end and how do we get there? The stability aspect of the figure of speech communicates that the beginning and the ending of this journey, our starting point and our ending point, form adjoining shorelines. What we cross over in between varies at different times during the liturgical year. At times it is

moving water or a field ripe with grain, and at other times it is a dry gulch or even a frighteningly deep canyon.

What is the passing-over that we undertake? The movement is not a journey through time, that is, from the Hebrew Testament period to that of the gospel, but a journey of transformation. We begin the Liturgy of the Word standing on the threshold of one way of being; we cross over to new self-understanding as Body of Christ. Prévost is suggesting that the bridge that carries us to this new way of being is the text of the responsorial psalm.

For Hebrew Testament scholar Harry P. Nasuti, the responsorial psalm has sacramental power. The psalms are agents of transformation. They are “the means by which the rest of Scripture is actualized in the believer. Indeed, they are not so much the human response to what is found in the rest of Scripture as they are the means by which such a response is made possible.”<sup>5</sup> Praying a psalm brings into being a reality that did not previously exist by changing the inner landscape of the one praying to fit the words of the psalm. This change is the work of God who through the power of the Spirit transforms the pray-er into the kind of person God wishes her or him to be. Specifically with the responsorial psalm in the Liturgy of the Word, the pray-er becomes the kind of person God is calling her or him to be in response to what God is saying in this particular proclamation of Scripture on this particular day.

The response we make to God’s word through the singing of the psalm is far more, then, than the audible activity of singing. Our response is the inaudible transformation of heart and mind God is bringing about within us as we sing the psalm. Our response is here-and-now in this liturgy, and beyond-and-after in the transformation of life that follows when the liturgy is over. Moreover, this transformation is not private, but communal. In singing the psalm we become more fully who we already are, the one Body of Christ surrendering self to the will of God for the salvation of the world.

All these scholars and writers agree that the responsorial psalm is more than just response to the first reading. Purdue points out

that the psalm is response to the Liturgy of the Word as a whole. Nowell demonstrates specifically how a given psalm is related to the readings and gospel of the day. Prévost suggests that the psalm is the bridge that carries us to the new way of being to which the gospel is calling us. Nasuti reveals that the psalm has sacramental power to bring about this transformation. The very singing of the psalm makes us more perfectly who we are: the one Body of Christ called into service of God and one another.

Their insights enable us to take a deeper look at what GIRM 61 is saying about the responsorial psalm. The responsorial psalm has “great liturgical and pastoral importance” because of its sacramental power to transform us into the persons God is calling us to be in the Liturgy of the Word. The “meditation on the word of God” that the psalm fosters is an active engagement in the process of personal transformation. The meditation is not self-enclosed, but leads us to give ourselves over to the paschal mystery unfolding in the Liturgy of the Word. We become more consciously the Body of Christ giving ourselves for the life of the world.

## **Examples of the Power of the Responsorial Psalm**

The following examples demonstrate what we have been saying about the power of the responsorial psalm by exploring two specific sets of readings. The first goal here is to show how the primary ministers of music—the assembly—can and ought to use the psalm to open up their understanding of the readings of the day. The second goal is to suggest how the psalmist as music minister is to embody that understanding in the manner in which the psalm is sung.

The first example is from the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A. In the first reading (Isa 55:10-11) we find Isaiah comparing God’s word to the rain and snow that come down from heaven. Both inevitably accomplish the purpose for which they are sent. There is power here, and it is the indomitable power of God. Yet the gospel reading contradicts the assertion

of Isaiah. In the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Matt 13:1-23) we hear that God's word does not always achieve its goal, for human sinfulness can block the power of the word. The two readings stand opposite each other: God's plan, which is always fulfilled, is blocked by the choices of human beings and the circumstances of human living.

What bridges the contradiction between these two readings is the confidence of Psalm 65. In it we sing that God has prepared both the grain and the land, "softening it with showers, / blessing its yield." The effect of the psalm is to turn our attention to the God who waters and plants. We must be honest about the resistance to God's word that the gospel tells us is ever present within the world and within our own hearts, but we need not lose hope because of it. The key is to focus our attention on the graciousness of God rather than on our own ungraciousness.

How wonderful, the psalm says, that God persists in visiting the "land" of our hearts and working it until we yield to receiving what God desires to plant. How wonderful that the word of God is stronger than any resistance we or the world put up against it. No matter how slow we are to receive the seed, how reticent to let it grow, how distracted from the task, God will bring what has been planted to abundant harvest. The psalm invites us, with all the fields and valleys, to sing and shout for joy!

The psalmist's ministry in singing this psalm is to communicate the assurance that no ground, no matter how poor, is left untilled by God. Whatever dry clods are in the way of our receiving God's word and letting it grow, God will tend to. We have only to let God do this work. The psalmist needs to embody this surrender physically and vocally. Tone of voice, facial expression, body stance, and gesture need to express the unbroken confidence in God that comes from surrendering oneself to God's word. The psalmist needs to let the assembly see how God is softening the dry soil within him or her and bringing forth life.

The second example is taken from the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A. In the first reading Ezekiel points out that it is not God who chooses the death of the wicked, but

the wicked themselves (Ezek 18:25-28). Those who turn from wickedness save their lives. Yet the chief priests and elders in the gospel (Matt 21:28-32) persist in choosing death by acting like the lazy son who pays lip service to doing his father's bidding but never follows through on his promise of obedience. Here we have the possibility of change juxtaposed with the refusal to be changed. Salvation has been promised and is possible, but it is not easy.

Again, the psalm turns our attention to the goodness of God who “shows sinners the way” and “guides the humble to justice” (Ps 25). The first reading and gospel point out that we have a tenuous hold on righteousness and easily fluctuate between “yes” and “no” to God. But the psalm indicates that God is a forgiving savior who never wavers. The psalm even sneakily reminds God of this by alluding to the “little creed” (“Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in kindness” (Ps 103:8) was a phrase first spoken not *about* God but *by* God as direct revelation to Moses: this is my name—Lord—and this is who I am—merciful, gracious, compassionate [see Exod 34:5-6]. The phrase appears so often in the Old Testament that it is called the “little creed,” a capsule profession of who God is and how God relates to humankind). God will teach us all we need to know and to live rightly and God will forgive us when we fail. We have only to ask, and to be honest (humble) about ourselves.

In singing this psalm the psalmist needs to let her or his body express the humility that arises out of honest self-knowledge and unwavering confidence in God's guidance and mercy. How does one stand before the assembly with such humility yet poise? The key is for the psalmist to use the psalm as a means of personal encounter with God. In the context of the first reading and gospel, how is this psalm inviting the psalmist to relate to God? What “ways” does the psalmist need to ask God to teach her or him? A psalmist who makes such prayer part of her or his preparation will communicate more than the words of the psalm to the assembly when singing. The psalmist will communicate the transformation God is bringing about within her or him.

These examples of using the psalm to enter into and respond to the whole of the Liturgy of the Word reveal the psalm's liturgical role and sacramental power. Reflection on the psalm enables us to hear more clearly what God is saying to us in the Liturgy of the Word. Singing the psalm out of this reflection enables us to respond to God with hearts open to the transformation God is bringing about.

## **Implementing the Singing of the Responsorial Psalm**

### *Selecting Musical Settings*

All that we have been saying has great bearing on the musical settings we choose for singing the responsorial psalm. The singing of the psalm expresses surrender in word and voice to the defining mystery of our lives, the paschal mystery. The psalmist embodies this surrender in body and breath, and mirrors through gesture the dialogue taking place between Christ and his assembled church. The assembly members' response sacramentalizes their assent by making it audibly and visibly apparent. What we need to consider above all when selecting a musical setting for the psalm is the capacity of that setting to enable and support such surrender. The setting must open up both the text of the psalm and the heart of the assembly.

The first principle of selection is that the psalm text be that given in the Lectionary (GIRM 61). While it is true that the translations in the Lectionary are themselves paraphrases to some extent (since adapting concepts from one language to another always requires adjustments), there is a huge difference between a translation that is exegetically based and a paraphrase that is driven by the requirements of a melodic line. Highly paraphrased psalm texts change the proclamation from word of God to idiosyncratic words of a human being. As a result, they interfere with the sacramental power of the psalm to transform us into the persons God is calling us to be in this particular Liturgy of the Word. Such settings may be poetically beautiful, musically uplifting, and emotionally appealing (most of them are). But

they are more appropriate for other times in the liturgy, such as, for example, during the communion procession when the text is not so central to fulfillment of the ritual action.

A second principle is to select psalm settings in which the text of the psalm predominates over the music. A setting so vocally, chorally, or instrumentally elaborate that the text cannot be readily heard and understood interferes with the role of the responsorial psalm. The music takes a starring rather than a supporting role. This is not to say that the music cannot be rhythmically or harmonically complex, but only that the complexity should not interfere with the clarity of the words being proclaimed.

A third principle is that the psalm setting should never overshadow the readings themselves (STL 155). If the assembly continues mentally humming the refrain during the subsequent readings, then the psalm setting has overreached itself. This is a difficult principle to implement for the psalm, and the manner in which it is presented must be inviting in order for it to lead the assembly to respond. We need to keep in mind that the psalm is meant to lead us beyond itself to the readings.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say, however, that we never use an elaborate musical setting of a responsorial psalm. Such is more than appropriate on solemnities like Christmas, Easter, Christ the King, and so on. On these occasions highly embellished musical settings, with perhaps more than one cantor or the choir as a whole singing the verses in harmony, and with solo instrument(s) added, communicate the high festivity of the day. But singing highly ornamented psalm settings Sunday after Sunday ignores the principle of progressive solemnity (STL 110–14) and eventually causes these settings to lose their festive import.

### *Forming the Assembly*

One means of leading the assembly to fuller participation in the responsorial psalm is to print the upcoming Sunday psalm refrain in the same spot in the bulletin each week. Include one or two sentences about the relationship of the psalm to the readings of the day.<sup>7</sup> Include an invitation to make the refrain a prayer mantra throughout the week.

A second aid is to select psalm settings that are easily singable, both for the psalmist and for the assembly. This norm will be relative to the abilities of your psalmist(s) and your assembly. What is the singing capability of your assembly? How used to singing the responsorial psalm refrain are they? If watching and listening to a psalmist is new to them, begin with simpler musical settings until their sung response becomes automatic. You might use the seasonal psalm refrains given in the Lectionary at nos. 173–74 so that the people are not having to learn new music every week. One of the valuable outcomes of this approach in the beginning stages of introducing responsorial psalmody is that the people will learn to look at the psalmist rather than following a line of music in the hymnal or missalette. The same principle we use with the proclamation of the readings applies here. Our goal is to lead the assembly to look at and listen to the psalmist rather than to follow the text in a book.

Another helpful starting point is to use a confident and competent psalmist. This may mean having the same psalmist sing every week at a given Mass for several months. The goal is to allow the assembly time to become comfortable and secure with responding to a psalmist, and this is easier for them to do when the person in front of them is both familiar and competent. Remember that your aim is not to involve as many people as possible in the ministry of psalmist, but to lead the assembly toward their participation in the singing of the psalm.

### *Forming Psalmists*

Train your psalmists, the advanced as well as the less experienced, to prepare the singing of the psalm in the context of the readings. Even before they look at the psalm, have them read the gospel and the first reading. During the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter have them reflect also on the second reading. Invite them to spend some time reflecting on and praying over what God is saying to them, and to the community of the church, on this particular Sunday in the liturgical year. Then have them look at the text of the psalm and see how it is connected

to the readings. Invite them to share with one another how the responsorial psalm opens up their understanding of what God is saying in the readings. Ask them how the psalm might shape their daily living of the paschal mystery during the week prior to the Sunday eucharistic celebration.

Psalms who understand the role of the psalm as response to God's transforming action in the whole Liturgy of the Word sing the psalm differently. They sing more than mere words. They sing their gift of self, their personal surrender to the paschal mystery. And it is this the assembly members hear, this that leads them to make the same response.

# 7

## Singing the Proper Entrance and Communion Chants

The directives in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* concerning the entrance and the communion processional songs are almost identical. Concerning the entrance song, GIRM 48 states: “In the Dioceses of the United States of America there are four options for the Entrance Chant: (1) the antiphon from the Missal or the antiphon with its Psalm from the *Graduale Romanum* as set to music there or in another setting; (2) the antiphon and Psalm of the *Graduale Simplex* for the liturgical time; (3) a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) another liturgical chant that is suited to the sacred action, the day, or the time of year, similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.” The guidelines given at GIRM 87 regarding the communion song are similar. GIRM 86 identifies the purposes of the communion song: “to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the ‘communitarian’ character of the procession to receive the Eucharist.”

## Looking Beneath the Directives

In both sets of directives it is clear that the texts we sing are to be *ecclesial* ones. They are meant to place the celebration of a local community within the framework of the universal church. They are meant to draw the locally gathered assembly into union with the worldwide and centuries-old Body of Christ. For this reason the preferred sources for these texts are universal, ecclesial ones. This means that the unity the song is to foster within those gathered is broader than the confines of a particular church space or parish community.

The directives further indicate that the texts we sing are to be *liturgical*. The chants contained in the Roman Missal, the Roman Gradual, and the Simple Gradual are musical commentaries on the Sundays, seasons, and solemnities of the liturgical year. As such they are integral to their respective celebrations and act to draw the assembly into ritual enactment of the paschal mystery as that mystery unfolds through the progression of the liturgical year. They are not neutral texts, but interpretive ones that place a liturgical frame around a given celebration and draw the gathered church into that framework.

Finally, the directives indicate that the texts most suitable for ecclesial, liturgical celebration are *scriptural* ones. The antiphons and chants contained in the liturgical books are taken from Sacred Scripture, primarily from the Psalter. By the fourth century the singing of a psalm during the communion procession (often Ps 34) had become common practice. By the seventh or eighth century the singing of an entrance antiphon and psalm, which began as the priest and ministers entered the space and ended when they reached the sanctuary, “set the tone for the celebration by conveying the spirit of the feast or liturgical season.”<sup>1</sup> From early on, then, the church could find no better commentary on the liturgical unfolding of the mystery of Christ than the inspired word of God, particularly psalm texts used in prayer by the Jewish community and prayed by Christ himself.

The directives in GIRM are not new, then, nor are they arbitrary. GIRM wishes to preserve the power of the liturgy to pull the gathered church into the mystery of Christ unfolding through the liturgical year. GIRM is not concerned as much with preserving a single form of music<sup>2</sup> as it is with identifying the kinds of texts that can authentically shape the self-understanding of the church. The intent of the document, as all church documents governing liturgical music, is to safeguard the deep structure of the liturgy by assuring that the songs we sing be truly integral to the rite, universal in outlook, and scripturally inspired.

### **Some Implementation Difficulties**

Although GIRM presents clear directives about what we are to sing for the entrance and communion processions, the road to implementing these guidelines does have some stumbling blocks. First of all, not all the options for the Propers are readily available. To date, no vernacular translation of the Roman Gradual has been done and only one English version of the Simple Gradual has been published.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, with the exception of the communion antiphons for the scrutiny Sundays of Lent, the entrance and communion antiphons in the Roman Missal and the Roman Gradual do not coincide with the three-year cycle of the revised Lectionary. The intent that these processional chants draw the gathered community into the particular Sunday or solemnity being celebrated is only partially achievable.

Perhaps the biggest block to achieving the musical goal of GIRM, however, is the resistance of the people who have become habituated to singing other music at these points in the Mass. Since Vatican II, we have been deluged with vernacular songs in numerous popular musical styles. This is as it should be, for the liturgical documents encourage the translation of the church's liturgical texts and music into forms accessible to contemporary peoples.<sup>4</sup> But in the rush to provide vernacular texts in contemporary musical styles, the qualifier that such music was to accord with the "spirit of the liturgy" (*Musicam Sacram*

9; GIRM 41), as well as the directive that the texts must always be consistent with Catholic teaching and “drawn chiefly from the sacred scripture and from liturgical sources” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 121), have sometimes been overlooked. As a result, people easily miss that the purpose of the music is to collaborate with the rite in helping them become more perfectly the Body of Christ dying and rising for the salvation of the world.

The resolution is neither to ignore the proper chants nor to dismiss vernacular songs. We need to decide between the relative merits of singing either. Our decision-making needs to be based on the liturgical, pastoral, and musical judgments outlined in *Sing to the Lord* 126–36. Furthermore, what we decide needs to be flexible, open to change as we, and the people we serve, grow in liturgical, pastoral, and musical understanding.

## **A Strategy for Using the Proper Chants**

### *Begin by Educating Yourself*

Read, study, and discuss with others the documents on the liturgy and liturgical music. Read not just for juridical content but, more importantly, for the theological underpinnings of this content. You will be more successful in implementing the church’s vision for liturgical music if you understand its ecclesial and liturgical foundations. Without this understanding, directives such as those given in GIRM remain only a set of rules. What must be implemented, however, is not a set of rules but a *theology* (the spirit of the liturgy) that will lead us to a *spirituality* (a way of living in which the liturgy shapes our daily choices and actions).

### *Make Use of Current Musical Resources*

Many gifted composers have been creating vernacular musical settings of proper entrance and communion antiphons. Lynn Trapp and Delores Dufner have been collaborating on adaptations of the introits into vernacular English that are poetically rich yet true to the original Latin imagery.<sup>5</sup> The antiphons are

set to familiar melodies the assembly can readily sing. The psalm verses, set for choir, interweave new melodic material with either the chant of the Latin introit or another chant associated with the solemnity being celebrated. These pieces are adaptable both for cathedral liturgies with elaborate choral and instrumental resources and for simple parish situations where only a small choir, or even just a cantor and organ, are available. A typical parish might select those that are accessible to the skill level of its choir and use them as entrance songs or as choral preludes on the appropriate Sundays or solemnities as well as other occasions.

James Biery has composed communion pieces utilizing the communion antiphons from the Roman Missal and the psalm verses suggested by the Roman Gradual. His “Communion Antiphons for the Advent Season” and “Communion Antiphons for the Lenten Season”<sup>6</sup> provide engaging but simple antiphon settings for the assembly and SATB psalm tones for the verses. These pieces can be used as assembly communion songs, or as choir-only communion songs while the presider and the extraordinary ministers of Communion receive, or as prelude pieces before the liturgy begins.

Charles Thatcher has translated the communion antiphons from the Simple Gradual and created chants to be sung throughout various seasons of the liturgical year as well as Ordinary Time. His *Communion Chants for the Church Year*<sup>7</sup> offers accessible modal melodies that can be led by SATB choir or a single cantor.

Paul Ford has set the entire repertoire of the Simple Gradual, as well as the repertoire of *Jubilate Deo*, the simplified Mass chants authorized by Paul VI in 1974, to traditional chant modes updated for contemporary English. *By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy* makes it possible for an assembly, led by cantor or choir, to chant all the sung parts of the Mass. The repertoire is intended to be sung *a cappella*, but can also be accompanied by handbells, as well as embellished by simple organum.

Christoph Tietze has set the entrance antiphons and psalms from the Roman Gradual for all the Sundays and solemnities of

the year to well-known metrical tunes. Tietze researched psalm paraphrases in numerous English-language metrical psalters, added additional paraphrases to complete the texts, and created metrical paraphrases of the antiphons. *Introit Hymns for the Church Year*<sup>8</sup> offers assemblies the possibility of singing the assigned introit of the day as a congregational hymn, a musical format familiar and accessible to them.

Columba Kelly, noted Benedictine chant scholar, has composed the *Saint Meinrad Entrance and Communion Antiphons for the Church Year*.<sup>9</sup> This *a cappella* collection contains accessible chants for the entire liturgical year. In another resource, Kelly offers a practical process for helping parishes introduce people to singing the proper antiphons.<sup>10</sup>

Ken Macek and Paul Tate have created contemporary musical settings of paraphrases of the proper introits for use during Advent, Lent, and Easter seasons.<sup>11</sup> These settings make the proper texts appealing for ears attuned to a contemporary musical style.

This citation of offerings is only a sampling of what is currently available and reveals the desire of composers and publishers to respond to the liturgical directive that we sing at Mass those texts that constitute the Mass. But more than musical resources are needed. We also need a plan of action.

### *Devise a Plan of Implementation*

First, assess the current parish repertoire and decide what needs to be “retired” because it is not adequate to, or even vies with, the spirit of the liturgy. Then plan a sequence for removing these pieces from the repertoire. Move slowly enough to avoid alienating those who are not yet ready for the deeper demands of the liturgy but quickly enough to meet the needs of those who are ready and hungry to experience a deeper connection between the liturgy and the music they sing. At issue is pastoral balance, but to do nothing is to risk the integrity of the liturgy and its power to form the people in their identity and mission as the church.

Next, decide how and when to introduce music more in accord with the vision of GIRM. For example, you might make

the First Sunday of Advent your starting point. Use Lynn Trapp and Delores Dufner's "Come, O Just One" (GIA, G-6194) as a choral prelude for the first three Sundays of Advent and as the assembly entrance song on the fourth Sunday, thus unifying the season and introducing the community to a text drawn from traditional liturgical sources. Or use James Biery's "Communion Antiphons for the Advent Season" as a choir-only piece at the beginning of Communion each week. Your choice needs to be made in light of the musical resources you have available and whatever pastoral pacing is best for your parish. What choice will best help this community move forward in their understanding and celebration of the liturgy?

Finally, once your plan has been set, run a brief bulletin blurb about what is being sung, beginning the Sunday before Advent (Christ the King) and repeated on all the Sundays of Advent. You might print something like this, for example, if you use "Come, O Just One" as a choral prelude:

On the Sundays of Advent the choir will be singing a prelude piece that has been in the repertoire of the church for centuries. The text is taken from the Roman Missal and draws us into the season of Advent when the church throughout the world begs God to send us a Savior. Listen carefully and you will hear two familiar Advent hymn tunes woven into the piece. You will also be ready for your part when we will all sing the refrain during the entrance song on the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

# 8

## Choosing Vernacular Entrance and Communion Songs

Vernacular religious songs are permitted at the processional points in the Mass provided these songs accord with the spirit of the liturgy. An excellent method for choosing such songs that ensures their liturgical suitability is to use the proper entrance and communion chants as a framework for decision-making. The entrance and communion chants supply musical commentaries on the Sundays, seasons, and solemnities of the liturgical year. These commentaries are a liturgical hermeneutic that moves the church forward in its celebration of the mystery of Christ unfolding through the liturgical year. The following section explores this liturgical hermeneutic and offers a methodology for selecting entrance and communion songs with this hermeneutic as guide.

### What We Mean by Liturgical Hermeneutic

The word *hermeneutic* comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes, whose task was to carry messages from the gods to human beings. What the gods wished to communicate to humans was sent by way of Hermes, who was swift and direct. Hermes had other personality characteristics, however, for he was also a thief, a trickster, and a bargainer. In short, he was a slippery character who needed

to be corralled. Negotiating with him required the art of interpretation, that is, the art of perceiving the message, understanding its meaning, and making sense of its application to one's life.

The hermeneutic we examine here is a *liturgical* one. In saying this we corral Hermes in a specific way. The phrase "liturgical hermeneutic" refers to the interpretive slant the liturgy places on texts, gestures, and symbols used in its celebration, and to the interpretive slant these elements place on the liturgy. The Lectionary, for example, does not present books from the Bible either in sequence or in their word-for-word entirety but selectively cuts and orders the readings to support the progression of the liturgical year. The Lectionary offers us a hermeneutic for understanding the liturgical year and its import for our lives. In turn, the liturgy, through its juxtaposition of other ritual elements (e.g., the purple vestments of Lent and the sprinkling rite during Easter season), offers us a hermeneutic for understanding these readings. A further liturgical hermeneutic is generated by the actions of those gathered for the celebration whose gestures, responses, prayers, and singing disclose the meaning of the rite and its application to their lives.

The task of liturgical hermeneutics, then, is to shed light on liturgical rites. Liturgical hermeneutics is concerned with how the liturgical rite becomes clear to us, how the mystery of Christ unfolding through the liturgical year and enacted in the liturgy becomes clear to us, and how we participate both in making these meanings clear and in the meanings themselves.

### **The Entrance and Communion Chants as Liturgical Hermeneutic**

We can exemplify how the entrance and communion chants provide a liturgical hermeneutic by examining the Propers given in the Roman Missal for the First Sunday of Advent. The entrance antiphon is: "To you, I lift up my soul, O my God. / In you, I have trusted; let me not be put to shame. / Nor let my enemies exult over me; and let none who hope in you be put to shame." What does this antiphon say about God? God is the

one who mediates between us and whatever is inimical to us and protects us from shame and derision. God is the one in whom we can trust, but God is also one for whom we must wait.

Who does this antiphon indicate we are? We are a people surrounded by enemies who wish to deride and shame us. We are a people who lift our hearts to God but must wait for God's response. We are a people who trust in God's response but find it is long in coming. We are a people who wait in patience and in hope and who feel the danger surrounding us in this in-between time before our redemption is completed.

What hermeneutic slant does this antiphon offer our celebration of the First Sunday of Advent? The antiphon places us in the context of the messianic longing of the first weeks of Advent. Only a week ago we celebrated the solemnity of Christ the King, victor over sin and death. A mere seven days later the liturgy faces us with the stark realization that this King has not yet come. We have more waiting to do, more evil and death to face. We are plunged from the heights of messianic fulfillment to the depths of our deepest, darkest need for salvation. What else can we do but lift our souls in trust to God?

This entrance antiphon forms a bridge between the end of one liturgical year and the beginning of another, between the messianic longings of the first two weeks of Advent and the incarnational hope of the second two weeks, between our trust in God's promise of salvation and our realistic struggle with all we experience that impedes this salvation. The antiphon combines absolute trust in God with utter realism about life. How perfectly this antiphon sets us up to hear the gospel proclamation to come in the Liturgy of the Word. In each year of the three-year Lectionary cycle the gospel reading for this Sunday challenges us to "stay awake" (Year A), to "watch" (Year B), to "be vigilant" (Year C) lest drowsiness and distractions lure us from the task of preparing for the second and final coming of Christ.

The communion antiphon for the First Sunday of Advent provides a shift in mood from the entrance antiphon: "The Lord will bestow his bounty, and our earth shall yield its increase."

Here we have no reference to the enemies who surround us or to the patient waiting we must undergo during our long, slow journey toward salvation. Instead we have an expression of simple unabashed hope: God will bless us and will do so abundantly.

The communion antiphon indicates the salvific movement that takes place within the liturgical rite itself. The liturgy shifts from longing for the coming of the Son of Man in the Liturgy of the Word (the “not yet” of salvation) to celebration of the fullness of God’s blessings in the Liturgy of the Eucharist (the “already” of redemption). The antiphons work together as two ends of a teeter-totter moving us from the depths of longing to the joys of fulfillment. The entrance antiphon makes a promise that the communion antiphon fulfills. This promise-fulfillment dynamic mirrors the whole movement of the Advent-Christmas season, the whole movement of salvation history, and the whole movement of daily Christian living.

The entrance and communion antiphons given in the Roman Missal for the First Sunday of Advent provide us a liturgical hermeneutic for the meaning of this particular Sunday within the whole of liturgical year and within the whole of Christian life. This liturgical hermeneutic flows in more than one direction. The antiphons interpret the place of the Sunday in the liturgical year’s unfolding of the mystery of Christ. They interpret the heart of the church in relation to this point in the unfolding mystery. The singing of the members of the assembly interprets the antiphons as well as the intentions of their own hearts. The liturgy in turn, through its use of concomitant texts, gestures, and symbols, interprets the antiphons and the assembly’s song. No single meaning is disclosed; rather, multiple ones are. Yet all these meanings interact within the confines of a single corral, the liturgical self-understanding of the church.

### **The Importance of This Liturgical Hermeneutic**

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM 48 and 87) does not require us to use the proper entrance and com-

munion chants, but allows us alternative choices. The priority GIRM gives the proper chants, however, establishes that there is a liturgical hermeneutic to guide our choices. We are to select our processional songs with the liturgical year and the liturgical self-understanding of the church in mind.

We cannot always find, nor do we need to find, a specific song that captures the liturgical sense or mood of a given Sunday. Nor do the entrance and communion songs need to interrelate as cogently as do the antiphons for the First Sunday of Advent discussed above. A generic song of praise is always appropriate for the entrance procession and a song celebrating our joy in being fed at the table of the Eucharist is always appropriate for Communion. But even these choices can connect more effectively with the Sunday or season if they are made with a liturgical hermeneutic in mind.

When we select vernacular entrance and communion songs with a liturgical hermeneutic in mind, the songs will help people encounter the particular aspect of the mystery of Christ being celebrated on this Sunday, this solemnity, or this liturgical season. The songs will pull people into conscious awareness of their identity with one another as Body of Christ. The songs will move people beyond their private selves to their ecclesial union with the universal church. The songs will critique the people's self-understanding and invite them into a new way of being Christ with and for one another.

### **Using This Liturgical Hermeneutic: Two Examples**

Our first example illustrating use of a liturgical hermeneutic relates to the Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C. The gospel reading of the day tells the parable of the importuning widow who wears down the recalcitrant judge by her persistent petitioning (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus begins the telling by admonishing the disciples to “pray always without becoming weary.” Considered in isolation, this gospel could be only about the general nature of prayer and the need for persistence. But considered in

light of its position near the end of the liturgical year, this gospel takes on a very different cast. Its import is specific, not general. As another year presses to a conclusion, as the journey of discipleship drags on, as the second and final coming of Christ delays, our hopes for justice, for redress of grievances, for final and full redemption flag. We begin to doubt God and God's promises. The core of this gospel is not its opening verse alone—"pray always"—but this verse in conjunction with the final one: "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

What, we are led to ask, is the relationship between faith and persistence in prayer? How is persistence in prayer an act of hope? What keeps hope alive when its gratification is so long delayed? How do we maintain trust in God when the redemption promised remains so far away?

The proper antiphons given for this Sunday in the Roman Missal add more to this liturgical hermeneutic. The entrance antiphon is: "To you I call; for you will surely heed me, O God; / turn your ear to me; hear my words. / Guard me as the apple of your eye; / in the shadow of your wings protect me." The communion antiphon is: "Behold, the eyes of the Lord / are on those who fear him, / who hope in his merciful love, / to rescue their souls from death, / to keep them alive in famine" (or the alternative text: "The Son of Man has come / to give his life as a ransom for many"). The liturgy begins with a prayer that God will guard us as the apple of his eye and moves to an acclamation of how closely God does keep his eyes upon us. Once again, the communion antiphon fulfills a hope expressed in the entrance antiphon. The liturgy reminds us that we can persist in faith and in prayer because, despite appearances to the contrary, God is acting to save us from death and lead us to life.

What vernacular songs does this liturgical hermeneutic suggest for this particular Sunday in the liturgical year? One possible choice for the entrance song would be "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." Both text and tune communicate the eternity in which God lives and thus enable us to put into perspective the short stretch of time through which we struggle and live. The

text further reminds us that God acts for our salvation throughout all time. We need never lack hope or lose faith. A possible choice for Communion would be the Taizé ostinato chorale “O Lord, Hear My Prayer,” using both the original text and the alternate text as a second verse. The full text would then be: “O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer: when I call answer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer. Come, and listen to me. The Lord is my song, the Lord is my praise: all my hope comes from God. The Lord is my song, the Lord is my praise: God, the wellspring of life.”<sup>1</sup> Sung quietly and repetitively with instrumental interludes, this song would enable the assembly to express both persistence in prayer and joy in being heard by God. Their singing would hold both the “not yet” and the “already” of redemption in perfect balance. What greater expression of faith and of prayer can we make?

As a second example of applying this hermeneutic, let us look at the Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A. Every year the Fifth Sunday of Lent marks the final week before the church’s annual celebration of Passion Sunday and our entrance into Holy Week. The gospel for Year A tells the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45). At the beginning of this story, Jesus knows of his dear friend’s fatal illness yet he puts off going to him. When at last he decides to go to Lazarus, the disciples point out the danger involved. Do you really want to go back where your enemies were just trying to stone you? they ask. When it becomes clear that no amount of arguing will dissuade Jesus, Thomas boldly urges, “Let us also go to die with him.”

What emerges from the background of the story is that in choosing to go to Lazarus Jesus is choosing his own inevitable death. To give Lazarus back his life Jesus deliberately gives up his own. He could have avoided this sacrifice of self. After all, Lazarus is already dead; why bother going now? Jesus goes in order to manifest God’s power over death. His choice discloses the depths of his love for his Father in whom he has absolute trust and for his disciples to whom he wishes to show that in the plan of God the ultimate outcome of death is new life.

To manifest the fullness of God's plan of redemption Jesus had to give his life for us. Jesus could not avoid death, and neither can we if we wish to go where discipleship leads us. The gospel of the Fifth Sunday of Lent asks us, where do we need to go to face the death redemption requires? On this Fifth Sunday of Lent we are getting closer both to the passion and death of Holy Week and to the resurrection of Easter. The gospel challenges us to say with Thomas, "Let us also go to die with him." Is not this choice the central meaning of the baptism for which the catechumens prepare and to which we recommit ourselves throughout these days of Lent?

The first reading of the day proclaims the conclusion of the dry bones narrative from Ezekiel (Ezek 37:12-14) in which God promises: "O my people, I will open your graves / and have you rise from them / . . . I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD." It is this promise on which Jesus stakes his life. His "I will do it" decision to go to Lazarus and his own certain death stands on God's "I will do it" promise to raise him from the grave. It is not only Lazarus's resurrection that the gospel narrative relates; it also foretells Jesus' resurrection. And ultimately ours. This Fifth Sunday of Lent challenges us to hear our own "Let us also go to die with him" as an echo of the Father's "I will do it." What gives us courage to die is God's promise of life.

The entrance antiphon states, "Give me justice, O God, / and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless. / From the deceitful and cunning rescue me, / for you, O God, are my strength." How readily we can hear these very words on the lips of Jesus as he proceeds to Bethany. How discerning of the church to offer them as our own words on this Fifth Sunday of Lent. The text of the communion antiphon is taken from the gospel reading, but with a slight amendment: "Everyone who lives and believes in me / will not die for ever, says the Lord." In the entrance antiphon we address God, pleading that God rescue us by defending us from the wicked. In the communion antiphon God answers us through the voice of Christ. Together the antiphons ground us in both sides of the Christian mystery,

the certainty of death and the certainty of resurrection. The one requires our choice, the other stands on God's promise. We cannot escape death; we cannot avoid confrontation with the wicked. The mystery is that God does not save us *from* death but *through* death. The liturgy reminds us that to surrender to this mystery is to live out the meaning of our baptismal commitment.

In juxtaposition with one another and with the gospel and first reading of the day, these antiphons offer us a liturgical hermeneutic for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A. This Sunday is about the certainty of death for those who remain faithful to discipleship. It is about the impending immediacy of this death. But it is also about God's steadfast promise that such death will not be "for ever," that God will open our graves and raise us to new and fuller life. The antiphons interpret our entrance into the final days of Lent by giving us the words we need to express the hope that grounds our discipleship.

This liturgical hermeneutic makes certain songs particularly appropriate for the entrance procession. The hymn "Take Up Your Cross,"<sup>2</sup> for example, challenges us not to let the weight of the cross fill our spirits "with alarm" but to lean on the strength of Christ, which will "bear your spirit up, And brace your heart, and nerve your arm." In Herman Stuempfle's "Martha, Mary, Waiting, Weeping"<sup>3</sup> we beg Jesus who has power over death to "Join our journey t'ward the grave." Thomas Troeger's "Before the Fruit Is Ripened by the Sun"<sup>4</sup> reminds us that for new life to come a seed must first be "dropped and buried in the soil," that "Before we lift in joy an empty cross, We face with Christ the seed's renewing death."

Songs particularly appropriate for Communion include "Now We Remain,"<sup>5</sup> which reminds us that "to live with the Lord, we must die with the Lord"; "I Am the Bread of Life,"<sup>6</sup> the refrain of which soars with the promise of resurrection; and Bernadette Farrell's "Unless a Grain of Wheat,"<sup>7</sup> which challenges us to accept the death that defines discipleship.

These examples demonstrate how to apply a liturgical hermeneutic to selecting vernacular entrance and communion songs.

The songs suggested in each example are not definitive, but merely samples of what can happen when the liturgical hermeneutic is used. Pursuing this hermeneutic as an ongoing approach to musical decision-making requires a plan of action that is both long-term and immediate.

### **Develop a Plan of Action**

First, become well acquainted with the liturgical year. Read and study the document *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*.<sup>8</sup> Understand what is happening in the life of the church as the year unfolds from the First Sunday of Advent to the solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King. Where on the road of discipleship is the church this Sunday, this season, this solemnity? To what is the liturgy calling the church at this point?

Next, study the readings of the day. Focus particularly on the gospel, which is the center and climax of the Liturgy of the Word. Read sequentially through the gospels of a given season so that you can see the direction they lead the church. Then think seasonally when you plan the music, rather than in terms of isolated Sundays.

Third, reflect on the entrance and communion antiphons of the day and relate them to the readings. What insights into the readings do the antiphons provide? What insights into the antiphons do the readings offer?

Finally, apply the liturgical hermeneutic to possible entrance and communion songs. Which ones will pull *this* assembly into the liturgical mindset of the church at this particular point in the liturgical year? Which ones will enable *this* assembly to enter more fully into the particular aspect of the mystery of Christ this Sunday, solemnity, or season is celebrating? Which ones will draw *this* assembly into deeper liturgical self-understanding?

The above strategy is a tall order that needs to be subdivided into manageable pieces. For example, you might set the goal of doing this process for just one season this year, then expand your efforts into another season next year. Or you might dele-

gate seasons to specific persons or groups, using members of the choir as well as persons from the pew. This would have the added catechetical advantage of teaching others the liturgical hermeneutic that is to guide song selection.

### **What We Gain from This Approach**

One of the dynamics of any hermeneutical process is that the meanings we uncover will challenge and critique us. Hermeneutics is a participatory process that engages our very sense of self. As we pursue the liturgical hermeneutic described in the preceding pages, we will find our self-understanding changing and this will bear immense fruit for our musical ministry in the church.

We will come to understand the purpose of the music on a deeper level, and our musical decision-making will move away from personalized viewpoints and feelings. We will not pick songs because they are our favorites, or because they happen to match the mood we are in at the time, or because the choir—or even the assembly—will enjoy them. Instead we will select songs because their text and style can lead the assembly into this season or solemnity of the church year. We will select songs because they can draw people out of their individual frames of mind and heart into the shared mind and heart of the whole church. We will select songs because they can pull people into liturgical participation in the paschal mystery of Christ.

More importantly, we will come to understand the liturgy on a deeper level, and will enter into its celebration with greater readiness to let its power transform us more fully into who we are: members of the Body of Christ enacting the mystery of his death and resurrection. We will relish the unfolding of the liturgical year as a means of participating in this mystery, and this appreciation will shape not only our actions during the liturgy but also our manner of living outside the liturgy. In essence, our very lives will become the liturgical hermeneutic we pursue, and what a difference this will make for the world.

# 9

## Choosing Music with the Liturgical Year in Mind

Sunday by Sunday, we are conscientious about making musical choices that will help the people enter into the liturgy of the day. But we need to stand back from each Sunday as an isolated celebration and look at our music planning from the perspective of the entire liturgical year. This chapter offers some practical ways to do so. It begins by offering an overview of the liturgical year. It then suggests some pastoral ways we can help those with whom we share the ministry of musical leadership (i.e., the choirs, ensembles, cantors, accompanists) grow in understanding the relationship between the liturgical year and the music we sing as that year unfolds. Finally, it offers some pastoral ways to help the most important music ministers—the assembly members—grow in their understanding.

### **The Liturgical Year**

The Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar (UNLY) states that through the yearly progression of the liturgical year “the Church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ” (1). The mystery unfolding is the paschal mystery of Christ giving his life so that we might share in his

divine life. How does the liturgical cycle, year after year, unfold this mystery? How does the year unfold this mystery in us, the Body of Christ gathered for liturgical celebration?

There is a formative relationship between the unfolding seasons and solemnities of the liturgical year and our identity and mission as the church. In the midst of the busy commercialism of pre-Christmas, the liturgical year draws us into the season of Advent. The gospel reading for each of the four Sundays of Advent has a distinctive focus (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* 93). The gospel for the first Sunday turns our attention toward the return of the risen Christ at the end of time. The gospels for the second and third Sundays relate the role and message of John the Baptist. The gospel for the fourth Sunday narrates events that immediately prepared for the coming of the infant Christ two thousand years ago. Advent begins by focusing us on the eschatological return of Christ in glory, and ends by preparing us to commemorate his first coming in the incarnation.

Each year Lent begins with the Ash Wednesday call to penance and leads to the Easter renewal of baptismal commitment. The blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday and the blessing and sprinkling with baptismal water on Easter Sunday identify Lent as a journey from dust to life-giving water, from death to resurrection, from waywardness to newfound steadfastness. Throughout the weeks of Lent those preparing for baptism and those already baptized walk together along this journey of conversion and commitment.

Easter season begins with the day of the resurrection and continues through eight Sundays, constituting an octave of Sundays and a week of weeks. We celebrate the fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost as one prolonged feast, one “great Sunday” for which Alleluia is our song (UNLY 22). From Easter Sunday through the third Sunday, the gospel readings recount the many appearances of the risen Christ to the disciples and reveal their astonishment and their struggle to believe what they see. In the gospel for the fourth Sunday, Christ the Good Shepherd prepares

the disciples for his physical disappearance on Ascension by assuring them of his continuing presence, protection, and care.

The gospels for the fifth and sixth Sundays (and the seventh Sunday where it is celebrated) are taken from Jesus' Last Supper discourse. Jesus prays for the disciples, pledges to remain with and in them, promises to send his Spirit to teach them all they need to know, and commands them to love each other as he has loved them. In the readings for Ascension the risen Christ ascends gloriously into heaven to take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. The final Sunday, Pentecost, celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit who transforms the disciples into courageous witnesses of the Good News of Christ's paschal mystery.

During the fifty days of the Easter season the risen Christ comes to us, his disciples today, in the liturgy. He allays our doubts and fears, assures us of his abiding presence, and prays for our endurance till the end of time. He sends his Spirit to empower us to announce to all the world the Good News of salvation. He leads us to grasp with clarity and commitment that we, his Body on earth, are to be this Good News of his victory over sin and death.

Apart from the festal seasons that have their own distinctive character, Ordinary Time constitutes the thirty-three or thirty-four weeks remaining in the liturgical year "in which no particular aspect of the mystery of Christ is celebrated" but instead, especially on the Sundays, "the mystery of Christ itself is honored in its fullness" (UNLY 43). The name Ordinary Time comes from the Latin word *ordo*, which means "to set in order." During this period the church simply counts the weeks of the year in an orderly fashion. On a deeper level this counting helps us keep track of the journey we are making with Christ as we travel the road of discipleship. Sunday after Sunday we encounter the risen Christ in the gospel readings, hear his words, watch his actions, and grow in understanding who he is and who he is calling us to be.

Ordinary Time is our period of prolonged fidelity, of ongoing pilgrimage along a journey that is sometimes quiet and unre-

markable, and other times turbulent and challenging. Ordinary Time is far from routine or inconsequential. On the contrary, its very everydayness gives it extraordinary consequence. It constitutes the bulk of our time, and contains the day in and day out choices that shape the deep faithfulness of our lives.

## **Planning with the Liturgical Year in Mind**

### *Plan Seasonally*

Planning only Sunday by Sunday misses the forest for the trees by setting each Sunday up as an end in itself rather than as a point on a continuum. The solution to this problem is to think seasonally. Begin by reflecting on each festal season (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter) as a whole. What is the starting point for each and what is the conclusion? Where does this season take us on our journey of discipleship? One helpful way to discover the meaning of a season and its internal movement is to read in sequence the opening collects for each of its Sundays. Read also the proper prefaces for the season given in the Roman Missal, nos. 33–51. The collects and prefaces mark each season with an identifying character. Prayerful reflection on these texts will likewise shape your musical decision-making.

Next, survey your parish's repertoire of service music. What setting of the gospel acclamation and of the eucharistic prayer acclamations (Holy, Holy, Holy; mystery of faith; Great Amen) most effectively express the character and movement of a particular liturgical season? Once you have identified settings that best fit each season, stick with them year in and year out. Over time your parish will come to identify each setting with its respective season, and this music will support their engagement in the movement of the liturgical year. Like the collects and the prefaces, these acclamations will become seasonal watermarks. (See chap. 10 for more on this point.)

Another aspect of planning seasonally is learning not to exhaust all musical possibilities on the first Sunday of a festal season. Treating the first day as the climax of a season, by, for

example, pulling out all the stops on Christmas Day, leaves little musical energy for the days yet to come. Epiphany ends up falling flat, and the Baptism of the Lord passes by barely acknowledged. Planning the Christmas music seasonally spreads out the musical highlights so that the entire season receives its due. Assemblies then experience the fullness of the season, and understand more clearly when a musical shift occurs at season's end to take them back to the quieter character and call of Ordinary Time.

### *Follow the Principle of Progressive Solemnity*

Throughout the varying seasons and the period of Ordinary Time, decisions made about the elaborateness of the music as well as the use of certain optional musical elements should follow the principle of progressive solemnity (*Sing to the Lord* 110–14). The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* directs, for example, that musical instruments should be used with moderation during the season of Advent (GIRM 303). The music of Advent ought not to overshadow the “full joy” of the music of the celebration of the Nativity. GIRM 313 restricts the use of musical instruments even more during Lent. With the exceptions of Laetare Sunday and solemnities and feasts that fall during Lent, instruments are to be used only to the extent an assembly needs them to support their singing. Through these directives GIRM is inviting us to enter the rhythm of the seasons that mark the liturgical year. During Advent and Lent we “hold back,” one time in hope, the other time in penance. By holding back in this way we allow the paschal mystery dynamic of the liturgical year—its built-in rhythm of not yet-already, of anticipation-celebration, of dying-rising—to have its formative effect upon us. This rhythm is no inconsequential thing, for it is the broad year-after-year immersion in the paschal mystery that marks our identity and forms us for our mission as Body of Christ.

The most helpful way to guarantee implementation of this principle is to draw up a specific set of directives governing how the principle will be followed in your parish. These directives would indicate, for example, on what days or for what seasons

the *Kyrie* is to be sung, which setting of the Mass is to be sung for each liturgical season, how the music will be subdued during Advent and Lent, on what days the assembly might sing a post-communion hymn of praise, and so forth. Involving a number of people in devising these directives (both choir members and people from the pews) would make it an excellent educational opportunity. (See chap. 10 for more on implementing this principle.)

## **Forming People in the Liturgical Year**

First, do what is necessary to help yourself grow in your own understanding of the liturgical year. Read and study UNLY. Second, help your choir and ensemble members grow in their understanding. In a prominent place in the rehearsal room, hang this quote from UNLY: “Throughout the course of the year the Church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ.” Then make a plan to let the significance of the statement influence every practice. In bits and pieces over the course of the year talk with choir and ensemble members about Christ’s paschal mystery, and about our participation in this mystery because of baptism. Talk about how each of the liturgical seasons and Ordinary Time make this mystery present. Tie your talking points to specific pieces of music you are rehearsing, such as a particular Mass setting they are preparing, or a specific communion song they are rehearsing, or a new choral prelude they are learning.

Third, talk with these ministers about how the music choices are meant to help the parish community enter into the progression of the liturgical year. In the rehearsal space, hang a chart of the liturgical year with the different seasons clearly identified. During the last weeks of Ordinary Time, before the beginning of the next liturgical year with the First Sunday of Advent, list on the chart the acclamations that will be sung for each season. Let the choir see the whole picture, its progression, and its relatedness to the unfolding mystery of Christ. Discuss with them the reasons for the acclamations selected for each season.

For example, the year I selected a Howard Hughes gospel acclamation found in the *ICEL Resource Collection of Hymns and Service Music for the Liturgy*<sup>1</sup> for the Advent-Christmas season I shared the reasons for my choice with the choir. This acclamation, I explained, has a bell-like quality that exudes joyful expectation. We will sing it simply during Advent, then during Christmas add organ and bells and sing it in canon. Using it this way throughout Advent and Christmas will both unify the seasons and differentiate between the anticipation of Advent and the fulfillment of Christmas. The choir appreciated this explanation and entered into learning and leading this acclamation with great commitment.

At the beginning of each season, talk with the choir about the meaning of the season and its specific invitation to enter the mystery of Christ. Then talk with them about the specific progression of the season. For example, show them how the first two weeks of Advent concentrate on Christ's eschatological coming at the end of time, and the last two weeks focus on this coming in the incarnation. What is the relationship between these two comings? Show them how Advent and Christmas are interrelated. Teach them about the Christmas progression from Incarnation, through Epiphany, to the Lord's Baptism. Use the seasonal collects and prefaces to demonstrate the progression and the interrelatedness. Finally, add to the chart the songs and choir pieces that will be used during the season and share with them how these musical choices are intended to help the parish move into and through this liturgical season.

One practical suggestion for forming assembly members in the liturgical year, in the function of music in the liturgy, and in their identity as the most important music ministers in the liturgy is to create a regular blurb in the weekly parish bulletin. Keep the blurb short and printed in the same spot in the bulletin every week. When a new liturgical season begins, say a few words about why they will be singing a particular Mass setting during that season. Run the same quote from UNLY you posted in the music rehearsal room and, again in bits and pieces, say a

few words each week about the significance of this quote. Add a note about how a particular song planned for the following Sunday connects to the gospel reading or the liturgical season. In short, let them know why they are singing each week what they are singing. You will begin to hear a big difference in the sound of their singing.

Taken collectively, the above suggestions are a tall order. They are not meant to be pursued in a single choir session, or in a single year. Pick a simple starting point and begin. Proceed slowly, and repeat often. Helping both those in music ministry and the parish as a whole deepen their understanding of the role of music in relation to the liturgical year will take time, but it is one of our most important tasks.

# 10

## Choosing Seasonal Sets of Service Music

This chapter outlines a process for selecting sets of service music appropriate to each liturgical season, beginning with principles that should guide the choices involved, and concluding with some suggestions. The goal is to establish seasonal sets of service music that stay in place, that is, that are reserved for the specific liturgical seasons for which they have been selected. Just as changes in art and environment cue the assembly about the changing of the seasons, so must the service music assist the parish to enter into the character of each season and into the unfolding rhythms of the liturgical year. In order for this to happen the parish needs to have a set of service music in place for each season that has over time become recognizable as a characteristic element of celebrating that season.

### Principles

#### *Observe the Character of the Festal Seasons and of Ordinary Time*

The service music you select needs to express the specific character of each festal season and of Ordinary Time. Begin by considering the liturgical year, both as a whole and in its individual seasons. Why does the church follow a liturgical year? What relationship exists between the unfolding seasons and solemnities of

the liturgical year and the identity and mission of the church? Why, in the midst of the busy commercialism of pre-Christmas, do we have the season of Advent? Why each year do we enter into the renewal period of Lent prior to the resurrection celebration of the weeks of Easter? What is the purpose of Ordinary Time and what formative influence does it bear on our growth in Christian living?

Each liturgical season and the period of Ordinary Time has its unique identity. Advent is directed toward the coming of Christ, both at the fullness of the messianic end time and in the here and now of today. Advent, then, is a season of preparation and expectation, of hope-filled joy, of patient yet confident waiting. Christmas is the celebration of promised fulfillment, of feasting in the coming of our Savior in human flesh. Yet, as it moves from the tender infancy stories through the martyrdom accounts of Stephen and the Holy Innocents to the baptismal commissioning of the adult Christ, it reminds us that our redemption is only completed through the mystery of death and resurrection. Lent is the season of baptismal renewal, and of the prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that mark this recommitment to Christian identity. Easter is the season of Alleluia, the octave of octaves *jubilus* in celebration of resurrection, when we are forbidden to fast (and in the early church to kneel when praying). Ordinary Time, the longest part of the liturgical year, is the period of prolonged fidelity, of ongoing pilgrimage through Christian life, which is sometimes quiet and unremarkable, and other times turbulent and challenging.

### *Observe the Principle of Progressive Solemnity*

The principle of progressive solemnity (*Sing to the Lord* 110–14) teaches us that not all liturgical celebrations are equal in importance, nor are all the elements of a given celebration of equal priority. Thus, the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter carry more solemnity than Ordinary Time. Christmas and Easter seasons are more festive than Advent and Lent. Solemnities such as Saints Peter and Paul and the Exaltation of the Cross take precedence over Sundays in Ordinary Time. The eucharistic prayer acclamations are more important musical elements than the Glory

to God or the Lamb of God. Applying the principle of progressive solemnity to the selection of service music means reserving more festive musical settings for the “high” seasons and the solemnities. It also means making judicious choices about when to use options such as the sprinkling rite or singing the *Kyrie*.

## **Process**

Begin by selecting a small committee to collaborate with you. Perhaps one or two members from each choir, a member of the parish liturgy committee, and one or two “persons from the pew.” Make the committee large enough to ensure a mix of input, but small enough to ensure that decisions can be made.

Have the committee read and discuss together chapter 1, “Liturgy and the Paschal Mystery,” and chapter 2, “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship: The Underlying Theology,” in this book, then help them articulate a clear vision of the role liturgical music is meant to play in the liturgy. Next have them read and discuss the section of this chapter on the liturgical seasons, their characteristics, and their relationship to the liturgical year as a whole and to the life and identity of the church.

Make a wall chart of the liturgical year, indicating the liturgical seasons and the service music elements. On the chart, list musical elements of the Mass in order of priority rather than in chronological order. (The chart given on p. 77 is a sample that may be reproduced.) Working together, inventory your present parish repertoire concerning these elements. Evaluate each piece of repertoire according to its suitability for the different liturgical seasons. As you select what best fits a given season, fill in the chart accordingly. Then note the blank spots in your chart and research new repertoire to fill these holes.

## **Some Suggestions**

The following suggestions are not definitive, but are meant simply to demonstrate how service music can be chosen to support the rhythm of the liturgical year.

For Ordinary Time, select two settings and switch from the first to the second at the point when the gospel reading either portrays Jesus deliberately turning his footsteps toward Jerusalem and the cross (Twenty-Second Sunday in Year A; Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Year B) or indicates a shift of attention toward the end time (Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Year C). For Lent, select the traditional chant Mass, in Latin or English (included in most current hymnals). For the festive seasons of Christmas and Easter, choose your most musically elaborate settings, ones with high rhythmic energy, full choir parts, and added instrumentation. Because of their interrelationship, you could use the same setting for both Advent and Christmas, singing it in simplified form during Advent and adding the choir parts and instrumental embellishments during Christmas. On solemnities such as Immaculate Conception, Saints Peter and Paul, the Assumption, and so on, use the Easter setting.

Implementing the principle of progressive solemnity means making decisions about optional musical elements. Celebrating the sprinkling rite with some form of song is most appropriate during Easter season, but also on days such as the Baptism of the Lord, All Saints, and Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Singing the *Kyrie* is particularly fitting during Lent because of its penitential character, but also during Advent because of its eschatological character.

Since the universal prayer is a litany, it is always appropriate to sing it, but you may not have the music or cantor resources to do so every Sunday. An approach applying the principle of progressive solemnity would be to sing it during the Christmas and Easter seasons and on such solemnities as All Saints and Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

## **Pacing the Process**

The process of creating a yearly cycle of seasonal service music can take a few years to complete. Once existing repertoire is earmarked for specific seasons, the task of researching and selecting

settings for those seasons for which the parish has no appropriate music, and then of teaching that new repertoire, will take time. Be realistic with yourself, your committee, and your parish. Set goals one small, achievable step at a time.

In terms of your committee, you want to avoid overwhelming them with the immensity of the project. You might subdivide the task, letting one group select eucharistic acclamations, and another decide about settings of the Glory to God and the Lamb of God. Or you might divide the work seasonally, assigning each season to a different subcommittee. It will also be helpful if you as music director make some prior judgments about available musical settings. Remove from consideration settings that are not appropriate musically, liturgically, or pastorally. This will facilitate the work of your committee(s), and help them more easily accomplish their goals.

Regarding the parish, the introduction of new service music needs to be sensitively paced. Learning one new setting a year is a major achievement for most assemblies. This means that some less appropriate music will have to stay in place for a time while the whole process of establishing a year-round repertoire of seasonal service music moves forward. What is important is that you know where you are going and what steps you are taking—slow but sure—to get there.

Regarding yourself, be patient with the size of the task and with the educational efforts it requires of you. Keep the goal in front of you, and think long-term. In the meantime, enjoy the process as it unfolds. You will be teaching the parish a great deal about the liturgical year and the importance of its rhythms; you will be collaborating with a number of parish members in establishing a solid parish repertoire of service music; you will be fulfilling the most important aspect of your ministry as a liturgical musician: leading the assembly to deeper participation in the yearly unfolding of the paschal mystery through the ministry of music.

	Advent	Christmas	Lent	Easter	Ordinary Time I	Ordinary Time II
Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations						
Holy, Holy						
Mystery of Faith						
Great Amen						
Gospel Acclamation						
Glory to God						
Lamb of God						
Penitential Act/Kyrie						
Rite of Sprinkling						
Sung Universal Prayer						

## Choosing a Parish Music Resource

The following pages outline a process for selecting a liturgical music resource for your parish or community. The process needs to be based on an understanding of liturgy as the ritual enactment of the paschal mystery, that is, the mystery of Jesus Christ's entire life, death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, and future eschatological coming, *and* our participation in that mystery through the demands of daily Christian living. In celebrating liturgy we—the Body of Christ—surrender to that mystery. We are also given the nourishment and strength we need to do so.

As with all the actions, gestures, words, and movements of liturgy, music is meant to further our enactment of and surrender to the paschal mystery. Far from being entertainment, music plays a demanding role in liturgy. It must provide nourishment that is lasting and formative rather than superficial and passing. The musical resource we choose to place in our pews says something about our liturgical understanding and commitment. It is not neutral.

### Process of Evaluation

Begin by making a working chart. Set up columns beginning with the hierarchy of sung elements in the Mass and progressing

to other items valuable in a parish music resource. Since the acclamations are the most important musical elements sung by the assembly, make this the first column. Make the second column psalm repertoire, the third hymns and songs. The fourth can be music for celebrations outside of Mass (i.e., Morning and Evening Prayer, RCIA, weddings, etc.). The fifth can be indexes. Make multiple copies of your chart for creating comparative evaluations of the resources you will be examining.

Since the acclamations are the most important sung element in the liturgy, look first at the service music. What does the resource offer? Are the settings well-crafted musically? Are they singable for *this* assembly? Is there a variety of styles that will help you establish a cycle of settings appropriate to the different seasons of the liturgical year? If not, can you supplement these offerings easily, for example, with another resource, or with settings already well known by the assembly? Perhaps all you need from a given resource is access to a setting not already in your parish repertoire. Remember, the goal is eventually to have seasonal sets of service music in place that support the unfolding of the liturgical year (see chap. 10). No single music resource needs to contain them all, and one of your supplemental resources will be the collective memory of the assembly.

Next examine the psalm settings. The psalms have many uses—in the Liturgy of the Word, in Morning and Evening Prayer, and in private devotional prayer. What does this resource offer? In addition to paraphrased translations that are suitable for liturgical moments such as the communion procession, does the resource include the Lectionary texts intended for use in the Liturgy of the Word? Are the musical settings well-crafted? Are they singable for *this* assembly? Are they settings that will stand the test of time, able to be sung year after year, or are they settings that will quickly become tiresome?

Look next at the songs and hymns. Is their language contemporary rather than archaic? Inclusive rather than exclusive? Is the collection culturally diverse? Do the texts support liturgical rather than private prayer? (This does not mean that a resource

should not include hymns for private devotional use, but that these should be clearly labeled as such and should not predominate.) What balance of the familiar and the new is offered? Of the new, are they texts and tunes that will stand the test of time, or are they “passing fancies”?

Check next for what is included besides music for Mass. Is there music for other sacramental celebrations? for RCIA rites? for Morning and Evening Prayer? In other words, how helpful is this resource for the total liturgical life of the parish?

Next explore what indexes are included. In addition to the alphabetical listing of first lines and common titles, a “knowledgeable” hymnal today includes a metrical index, a tune index, a liturgical index, a topical index, an index of hymns and songs according to the church year, an index of psalm refrains, an index of Scripture passages related to hymns and songs, an index of composers, authors, and sources, and a listing of acknowledgments. All of these enable a more intelligent use of the contents of the resource.

Finally, evaluate the format and appearance of the resource. How are its contents organized? Is the service music in an easily identifiable and prominent place? Are the hymns and songs ordered according to the liturgical year? Is the layout easy to look at and follow? Is the paper of good quality? Is the cover attractive and durable?

## **Pacing the Process**

The steps outlined above are simple but they cannot be done quickly. The choice of a music resource will be better made if it has been given sufficient time and if a number of persons in the parish community have participated in making it. It is not realistic to have everyone in the parish community involved, but it is very important to use a representative group: the music director, a member of the liturgy committee, one or two members of each of the choirs, one or two representatives from each age group from teenagers to senior citizens, and one or two rep-

representatives from each of the cultural/racial/language groups who make up the parish. Part of the task will be to lead this group to a knowledge of liturgy and liturgical music so that their discussions will proceed from informed opinion rather than just personal likes and dislikes.

The task needs to be divided into manageable segments (never meet for more than sixty to seventy-five minutes—beyond that time limit people rush to decisions because they are tired and want to get home!). Use relevant chapters in this book to guide the discussion. For your first session, talk about liturgy as enactment of the paschal mystery. This is the foundational session and the content needs to be carefully presented and discussed. End the session by giving the group some personal reflection to do. For example, ask them to come to the next meeting prepared to share how what they learned at this meeting affected the way they participated in Sunday Eucharist.

For the second session deal just with the acclamations (see chap. 5). What are the acclamations? Why are they the most important musical element in the liturgy? What is the assembly doing when they sing them? Why have seasonal sets? Once the group has developed an understanding of acclamations and their role, evaluate the service music in the music resources you are considering.

In your third meeting evaluate the psalm settings (see chap. 6). What is the role of the responsorial psalm in the Liturgy of the Word? What criteria make for a “good” responsorial psalm setting? What do the music resources you are considering have to offer? What is your evaluation of these offerings?

Your fourth discussion can focus on the songs (see chap. 8). When are vernacular songs used in the liturgy? What are their different functions? What makes a song “good” liturgically, musically, textually, and pastorally?

The remaining three segments—music for rites other than the Eucharist; the indexes; the resource’s format and appearance—can probably be considered at one meeting. What is the usefulness of this resource beyond music for the Mass? What

does the physical construction and appearance of the book say about the value and place of liturgy in the life of the church?

By this time your committee will have a very full chart to look at! The question now will be to compare the relative values of the resources you have been examining. Which one(s) will enable this parish to enter more deeply into the celebration of liturgy as ritual enactment of the paschal mystery? Which one(s) will both help you build on past tradition and take you into the future? Which one(s) will deepen your sense of identity as the Body of Christ as well as expand it?

No one musical resource will contain everything a given assembly needs. Compromises will have to be made, and no matter what you select, supplemental resources will be needed. But the very choosing of a resource, and the process by which you choose it, is itself a symbol of the importance of liturgy, of its dynamism at the center of the church's life, of the care with which we approach the celebration of liturgy, and of the care with which we nurture the assembly's participation in the liturgy. This is, after all, what we are singing about.

## Liturgical Music and the Role of Silence

One of the most important directives in *Sing to the Lord* can be found in this simple statement: “The importance of silence in the liturgy cannot be overemphasized” (STL 118). This may seem a strange directive in a document concerned with providing beautiful sound for the liturgy. But STL explains so simply that silence is as sacramental as sound (118), for it can reveal in its seeming nothingness the everythingness of the presence and activity of God. Moreover, silence is both the starting point and the destination of all the sound that is music (118). In other words, silence, like love, comes first and remains last.

Hence, “[m]inisters and pastoral musicians should take care that the rites unfold with the proper ebb and flow of sound and silence” (STL 118, referencing paragraphs 91, 94, 151, 176, 199, 209, 215, 243, and 249 from the same document). While it is easy to introduce moments of silence into the liturgy by simply imposing them (e.g., after the readings and homily), it is not so easy to lead people into the deeper silence these moments intend. As a spiritual writer once pointed out, we are a culture of shared restlessness for whom fidgeting in church is at one with our fidgeting through life. In the pastoral realm, what does this mean for us who are liturgical musicians? How do we implement silence in the liturgy? How do we lead ourselves and others to

become comfortable with something our culture avoids, even fears? We need to begin by reflecting on the meaning of silence and the possibilities it opens up for the praying community. We then need to explore the roles silence plays in our liturgical prayer. Finally, we need to experience silence ourselves by practicing some ways to enter its depths. Only then will we be able to help our assemblies enter into silence with ease and appreciation.

## **The Meaning of Silence**

Silence can be both positive and negative. Silence can be kind, but it can also be cruel and hateful. Silence can be warm and receiving, or cold and dismissive. Silence can be a sign of forgiveness, but it can also be a frozen refusal to forgive. Some silence is fearful, suspicious, self-protective, while other silence is trusting, like that of a child sleeping on its parent's lap, or that shared by companions engaged in a common task, or that between persons who intimately love each other. Some silence is awe before unspeakable beauty, while other silence is horror in face of what is unspeakable. Finally, some silence marks the presence of death and the end of life and all possibility, while other silence communicates surrender to the life-giving possibilities death brings.

Silence, then, is polyvalent. This very polyvalence reveals the limitless stretch of silence and its possibilities: silence speaks everything. Silence is, then, the realm of God. As one Jewish mystical tradition teaches, "all God revealed at Sinai was the letter *aleph*—the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet which is a silent letter. All explanation is contained in the silence. The totality of God's revelation to humanity is in a single letter that bears no sound; the richness of such a silence defies imagination. The silence encompasses all words, and transcends them."<sup>1</sup>

## **The Role of Silence in the Liturgy**

Silence in the liturgy has many roles depending on its differing contexts (GIRM 45). At some points our silence is that of

preparation, as when we gather ourselves inwardly before Mass begins. At some points, our silence is that of personal prayer, as during the pause between the presider's "Let us pray" and the opening collect. At some points our silence is that of reflection, as when we meditate on the words of Scripture after the readings. At some points our silence is that of attentiveness, as when we listen quietly to the proclamation of the eucharistic prayer, joining our minds and hearts to the voice of the presider. At some points our silence is quiet awe and gratitude, as when we reflect after Communion on the mystery of what we have just received. Beneath all these differentiated roles one purpose stands: the silence is meant to lead us into the silence of God where all is spoken.

Liturgical silence is, then, an act of yielding, of giving self over to hearing what God is going to say. We yield by choosing to become quiet, putting a stop to our own verbalization, to our bodily restlessness, to our mental stream of consciousness. Liturgical silence is also an expectation, an expectation born out of confidence that God will speak. We do not know, however, when God will speak or what God will say<sup>2</sup> and our willingness to suspend controlling God becomes another aspect of our yielding. This need to yield and this inability to control God's response makes liturgical silence dangerous, for such silence is necessarily a void. We must void ourselves and we must face the void of God's possible absence. We must deal with the void of unknowing. We must enter the realm of death.

Moreover, our yielding and our expectation are directed not just to God but also to one another. Our silence is a gift to the other members of the assembly, a yielding of self to the corporate prayer of the Body of Christ and an expectation that this Body, these others, will enrich our prayer and increase our capacity to hear what God has to say; that this Body, these others, will stand with us before the void in shared hope that this seeming nothingness in fact contains everything. As with God, we cannot control when or how others in the assembly will fulfill our expectations. After all, we know from personal experience that not all human

silence is positive. And this makes our choice to enter liturgical silence an even more significant act not only of faith in God but also of trust in the human beings standing beside us.

Without moments of silence in the liturgy, the moments of sound, whether word or song, become strident brass and tinkling symbol. For silence is both the source of sound and its foil. The faith expressed in the sounding of word and song is only as authentic as the yielding that begets it. And this yielding occurs only in the deepest silence where the self stands naked and hopeful before the Other/others.

### **Learning Silence**

On a purely physical level silence is absence of sound. But this absence has many levels.<sup>3</sup> First is simple noiselessness. Try it. Let yourself become noiseless. What do you have to do (or, more accurately, stop doing)? Notice and identify all the things you hear now that you were not hearing before. Let yourself remain noiseless while you slip into the second level of silence, body stillness. Stop moving your fingers, hands, arms, legs and let your muscles relax. Notice how your breathing deepens and slows. You're ready now for the third level, mind stillness. Let go of whatever you are thinking about. Relinquish all the worries, agitations, unfinished business, and unsettled feelings swirling around inside your head. Notice how much more your breathing deepens and slows. Notice how your awareness empties of even the new sounds you had begun hearing when you became noiseless. You are moving now into the final level of silence, soul stillness (prayer), the emptiness of receptivity. This is the level of silence needed for liturgical prayer.

What was this little exercise like for you? What did you learn about silence? What did you learn about yourself? Was this exercise easy for you, or was it difficult? What made it easy? What made it difficult?

The importance of experiencing deep silence yourself and of making it a part of your daily living cannot be overestimated if you are to lead your parish community to this kind of silence in the lit-

urgy. Some ways to make silence a daily practice might be: turning off the car radio on the way to and from work and simply listening to the quiet; spending the first five minutes at work sitting quietly in your office or in church, practicing the four levels of silence described above (your day will go better!); beginning every work session in which you will be planning upcoming liturgies, alone or with others, by practicing the four levels of silence (your planning will go better!); spending the last five minutes before dropping off to sleep practicing the four levels of silence (you'll sleep better!).

Another essential practice is to enter silence right before the liturgy begins. Let yourself yield to God as the focus of the celebration and let go of centering on yourself and your performance or the performance of the choir. This yielding will communicate itself nonverbally to the choir, the cantor, and the instrumentalists, and (believe me) they will all do their ministries better. Together you will model for the assembly the yielding to which the liturgy is calling them.

Maintain this yielding silence while the liturgy unfolds. This means letting go of fiddling with things like music, music stands, and microphones during Mass (or when necessity requires such adjustments, doing so in a calm, quiet, undistracting manner). This means truly listening to the proclamation of the readings rather than worrying about the next piece of music. This means letting go when the choir doesn't quite hit the notes or remember the dynamics you so diligently drilled (there will be time later to assess why and what to do about it). This means learning to let your music-making be prayer rather than a distraction from or interference with prayer.

## **Teaching Liturgical Silence**

We don't so much teach others silence as model it for them. The choir and instrumentalists will learn silence by watching you. They will know when you are listening to the readings and when you are not; when you are attending to the proclamation of the eucharistic prayer and when you are not; when you are offering

quiet thanksgiving after Communion and when you are not. So will the assembly. The quality of liturgical prayer in a given celebration is influenced more by the attitude and behavior of the presider and the music ministers than by any other liturgical ministers. This may sound like a heavy burden, but it is actually an uplifting gift, for it means that the quietest of your gestures—your silent yielding to God and your unspoken expectation of God’s response—have the greatest impact. Through your silence God speaks. The fact that you cannot know when or about what is of no consequence.

### **Silence as the Fulfillment of Music**

STL speaks of the profound relationship between music and silence: “Music arises out of silence and returns to silence” (118). Silence may be the absence of sound, but it is not the absence of music; rather, it is its fulfillment. When the music used in liturgy leads the members of the assembly to the awesome silence that flows from their surrender to the mystery of Christ unfolding within and among them, the music has achieved its ultimate purpose.

Silence in the liturgy is, then, a musical activity. Our challenge as liturgical musicians is to make this silence a musical habit. Citing John Paul II’s 1998 Address to Bishops of the Northwest Provinces of the USCCB, STL reminds us, “In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty” (12). One aspect of our ministry as liturgical musicians is to form our assemblies in the art of musical hearing and this means the ability to discern the meaning of both what is communicated through sound and what is expressed through silence.

### **Some Pastoral Challenges and Applications**

#### *Silence before Mass Begins*

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* directs that silence is to be observed in the church, the sacristy, the vesting

room, and adjacent areas even before the liturgy begins “so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred celebration in a devout and fitting manner” (GIRM 45). The directive does not intend that we eliminate prelude music, but that we make liturgically sound choices about what we play or sing at this point. The prelude music must draw people into the kind of presence that prepares them for liturgical celebration. It must help them move from private preoccupations to readiness for the communal prayer of the Body of Christ. It must assist them to become ready for the action of God about to take place in the liturgical celebration and the communal liturgical response that they will be called upon to make. Instrumental or choral music that draws the assembly to awareness of their identity as Body of Christ, to readiness for liturgical prayer, and to presence to the liturgical feast or season is always appropriate. On the other hand, devotional pieces that pull the assembly either into private prayer or into the personality or emotional frame of mind of the performer(s) is not. At stake here is understanding the liturgical function of prelude music and its relationship to the surrender required for liturgical celebration.

### *Silence during the Presidential Prayers*

GIRM 32 directs that while the presider is speaking or singing the prayer parts assigned to him there is to be “no other prayers or singing, and the organ or other musical instruments should be silent.” GIRM 30–31 and 33–34 identify the different types of presidential texts: communal prayers (i.e., the eucharistic prayer, the opening collect, the prayer over the offerings, and the prayer after Communion); introductory and explanatory remarks permitted in the rite (e.g., a brief introduction to the Mass of the day done after the greeting); private prayers (e.g., those before and after his own Communion); and dialogues between presider and assembly (e.g., the greeting, the preface dialogue).

With the exception of the private prayers, all the presidential texts are to be spoken or sung in a “loud and clear voice” and the assembly members should “listen to them attentively” (GIRM 32). GIRM indicates that nothing is to interfere with or compete

for the assembly's attentiveness to these presidential texts. Why? Because introductions or explanations need attending to if they are to fulfill their purpose of drawing the assembly into more conscious participation. Because the opening collect, prayer over the offerings, and prayer after Communion are prayers of the whole assembly, voiced by the presider in the name of Christ (GIRM 30). Because the eucharistic prayer is the highpoint and center of the entire rite and "requires that everybody listen to it with reverence and in silence" (GIRM 78).

This directive challenges a popular trend to use music without interruption from the entrance procession through the opening collect or from the fraction rite through the prayer after Communion. Many of the musical settings based on this trend include instrumental music to be played as background while the presider is speaking some presidential texts (e.g., "Behold the Lamb of God" immediately before the communion procession). Behind this practice is a misunderstanding of what we mean when we say liturgy is to be musical. It is not an underlying musical commentary that will hold the rite together, but the unfolding dynamic of the paschal mystery and the assembly's gradual surrender to that dynamic. To underscore these presidential texts with music is simply to acquiesce to popular culture's notion that every activity of human life, from grocery shopping to family meal times, must have some extraneous background accompaniment, be it Muzak or TV. We are afraid as a culture to focus our attention. Are we likewise afraid as the Body of Christ at worship to focus our attention? Are we perhaps instinctively afraid of what the rite will demand of us if we truly listen?

The intent of GIRM 32 is to preclude anything that competes for the attention of the assembly. Some musicians will argue that the music draws the assembly more fully into the words the presider is speaking/singing. But it is surrounding silence, the absence of any other sound (as well as the absence of any other movement) that grants the spoken/sung text its greatest clarity and power at these points in the rite. The silence itself is the deeper music out of which the words are to arise.<sup>4</sup>

The directive draws us once more to the more difficult and long-term side of our ministry, that of formation of people in the deepest meaning of full, conscious, active participation in the liturgy. It is far easier to use music to engage the surface level of people's attention during Mass than it is to use music to draw them into the paschal mystery demands the liturgy is making upon them. And the starting place will be with ourselves. How willing are we to surrender to the paschal mystery demands of our ministry? What immediate gratification do *we* need to give up in order that the liturgy may lead us to its deepest reward? How will silence lead us there?

# 13

## A Paschal Mystery Spirituality for Ministers of Music

What shapes all liturgical spirituality—and this includes the spirituality of liturgical music—is the call to paschal mystery living that arises out of our baptismal identity as Body of Christ. As liturgical musicians we encounter the paschal mystery and surrender to its transforming grace in numerous concrete, ordinary, and ongoing ways. For example, every time we choose to use music to lead the assembly to Christ rather than to ourselves, we are surrendering to the paschal mystery. Every time we conscientiously select music best suited to help this assembly pray the liturgy rather than music that will only entertain, we are surrendering to the paschal mystery. We die to ourselves every time we arrive prepared and ready for liturgy, every time we stay late because more rehearsal is required, every time we remain faithful to the disciplined preparation liturgical music requires. We surrender whenever we remain present to the liturgical action even when this is our fourth or fifth Mass of the weekend. We die to ourselves both when we persevere in the hard task of helping the choir sound better and when we accept with patience the best sound they can give.

When we die to ourselves in these ways, the rising of Christ is heard in the stronger, more prayerful singing of the assembly.

The rising of Christ is felt in the assembly's deeper participation in the liturgy. The rising of Christ is seen in the greater attentiveness choir and ensemble members give the liturgy, and in the greater collaboration they evidence with one another.

But the power of music to form us in the paschal mystery is neither automatic nor guaranteed. The music can lead us to surrender ourselves to the paschal mystery demands of the liturgy, and it can also be the first thing to sidetrack us from these demands. Sometimes the failure is the music itself when it is poorly written or poorly texted. Sometimes the failure is our use of the music when it is misplaced in the rite. And sometimes the failure is in our own timorous hearts. The power of song to "do its liturgical job," so to speak, is directly related to our willingness to surrender ourselves to the paschal mystery.

When the music pulls us *away from* the ritual action, drawing us instead either to itself or to ourselves, this is telling us that we as musical leaders (organist, instrumentalist, choir member, cantor, etc.) are not allowing God's grace to transform our natural resistances to the paschal mystery. The core of this mystery is dying to self, and none of us deliberately seeks this out. And so instead of choosing self as Body of Christ we choose self as musical performer. There is a tension here, for the ability to lead music in worship (i.e., to stand before an assembly and cantor a psalm; to play an instrument in public, etc.) takes performance ego. How do we allow this ego to be subsumed into the ego of Christ? There is a dying to self here. Or instead of choosing self as Body of Christ we choose to stay locked in the world of our private relationship with God. There is a tension here, for this private world is essential to authentic Christian living, but it is not the world we are called to enter when we gather for liturgy. The call is to surrender to our relatedness to one another, to our common identity as church. There is a dying to self here.

When the music pulls us *away from* the ritual action, this is telling us that we may be choosing only music that will entertain us, make us feel good. There is a tension here, for "feeling good" can be a result of prayer. The purpose of music in liturgy,

however, is not to make us “feel” religious, but to make us *be* religious,<sup>1</sup> and this does not always feel good. We are talking here about the passion that is deeper than passing feelings, the passion, for example, that keeps a spouse day after day, week after week at the bedside of a terminally ill husband or wife; the passion that kept Nelson Mandela in prison for twenty-seven years; the passion that led Sr. Dorothy Stang to lay down her life for the poor of the Amazon; the passion in ordinary, everyday life that leads a mother to change a dirty diaper, and a father to apologize to a son he has hurt. There is a dying to self here.

When the music pulls us *away from* the ritual action, it may be, beautiful as it is, the wrong music. There is a tension here, for the same music that enables one community to enter the ritual may impede another. Joseph Gelineau has often argued that the most beautifully constructed Bach chorale can be the worst liturgical choice for an assembly for whom, for whatever reasons, such music does not speak liturgically. Or the music may be liturgically potent, but performed so poorly that it impedes rather than supports liturgical participation. There are two issues here: what music is in fact liturgical music, and what music will help this community here enter the rite. Addressing these issues challenges us to know the rite, know the nature of liturgy, and know the character and culture of our local community. There will be a dying to self here.

On the other hand, the music will pull the assembly members *into* the ritual action when we allow them to be the primary liturgical musicians. There is a tension here, for we who are professional musicians and presiders must move over. But this makes our position more important, not less so. Ours is the task of identifying where the real song of Christ arises, what that song is about, and how we can encourage and strengthen that song. There is a dying to self here.

The music will pull assembly members *into* the ritual enactment when we have helped our parish develop a “durable and ample body of ritual music.”<sup>2</sup> There is a tension here, for the task calls us to grow in our liturgical understanding and to surrender

our preferences to the broader vision of the church. There will be some music we love that will need to be “retired” from the repertoire, and there will be the endless and challenging task of forming the assembly in liturgical prayer and spirituality. It is far easier to teach new and entertaining music than it is to form people in liturgical prayer. There will be dying to self here.

One of the most telling indications that we as liturgical musicians are choosing to die and rise with Christ will be the presence of silence within the assembly. This is paradoxical because we tend to measure our success in terms of noise level. I am not referring here to full-bodied assembly singing—that is a good sign. But even the most energetic, upbeat singing of an assembly that has been led to surrender to Christ will convey a dimension of silence that can be heard beneath the notes. This silence is the manifestation of their presence to prayer, to Christ, to one another as Body of Christ. This silence is the inaudible sound of their surrender to the mystery that shapes their lives. An assembly that has entered this level of silence will not wish to break it with applause.

And here we as musicians enter another level of dying to self, for an assembly focused on Christ will not be paying attention to us. I often tell psalmists, for example, that one sign they are leading the assembly to pray the responsorial psalm is that they will find themselves being complimented less frequently for the beauty of their voice. They will have disappeared into the anonymity required to do their ministry well. But is not such transparency the goal of all liturgical prayer and of the music that supports it? We must decrease so that Christ may increase. There is a dying to self here.

As music ministers, we cannot arrive at the celebration of liturgy ready to take on the ritual demands of surrendering to the paschal mystery unless we are already surrendering to these demands in daily Christian living. The pastoral mission of leading the community to authentic engagement in the liturgy is broader than the time frame of the rite itself. The musical task is also broader. Both music and liturgy share a common orientation

toward the totality of living. Liturgy aims to lead the Christian community to deal with daily living from the single liturgical attitude of living the paschal mystery. Our work as music ministers is more than the preparation and performance of the music. Our work is to be mystagogues of the rite who reveal by our very manner of acting, both within and outside of the liturgy, the paschal mystery at the heart of liturgy and of Christian living. Our work is to form our people in sung liturgical prayer—its demands, its practice, its graces. Our work is to lead our people to understand full, conscious, active participation in the liturgy as the giving of self through, with, and in Christ to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we discover that the pattern of our pastoral response to these liturgical music challenges is identical to the pattern of our response to the liturgical ritual itself, that both the doing of music in liturgy and our preparation of self and assembly for it are a participation in the dying and rising mystery of Christ, we discover the deepest level of the spirituality of liturgical song. Over and over the singing calls us to die to self by giving self to God and to the human beings who surround us. And in the transformation it renders within and among us—deepened presence, softened resistance, mutual empowerment—we rise to new life in Christ. What we sing in the liturgy is the paschal mystery of our dying and rising as Body of Christ. This is the spirituality that liturgical singing calls us to and fosters within us, in both rite and daily living. May we sing with abandon!

# Notes

## Introduction

1. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), December 4, 1963. Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

2. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).

## Chapter 2

1. *Music in Catholic Worship*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

2. *Liturgical Music Today* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

3. For expanded discussion of song as shared resonance and as revelation of hidden will and intention, see my *The Mystery We Celebrate, the Song We Sing*, chap. 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

## Chapter 4

1. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (ICEL, 2010).

2. The inclusion by STL of the lector in these directives is somewhat misleading since GIRM 59, 128, and 130 classify the lector's "Word of the Lord" at the conclusion of a reading as an acclamation. Structural analysis of the dialogues and the acclamations reveals that in the dialogues the assembly responds to the ordained ministers leading the rite, while in the acclamations the assembly speaks directly to God or to Christ. At the conclusion of a reading, then, the lector is introducing an acclamation, not engaging in a dialogue.

3. An excellent resource for this is Anthony Ruff, "Do Priests Need to Sing?" in *Pastoral Music* 28, no. 3 (February-March 2004): 41-43.

## Chapter 5

1. Although the placement of the mystery of faith can lead people to misconstrue its intent, what we acclaim in singing it is not the consecratory moment, but the entirety of the mystery of Christ.

## Chapter 6

1. Peter Purdue, “The New Lectionary,” *Doctrine and Life* 19 (1969): 666–79.

2. During Ordinary Time the second reading was not intentionally chosen to correspond with the first reading or gospel passage, but instead is a semi-continuous reading of a specific apostolic letter. During the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter, the second reading was selected because of its relationship to the character of the season and the gospel of the day.

3. Irene Nowell, *Sing a New Song: The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993).

4. Ralph Keifer, *To Hear and Proclaim: Introduction, Lectionary for Mass with Commentary for Musicians and Priests* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1983) 81.

5. Harry P. Nasuti, “The Sacramental Function of the Psalms in Contemporary Scholarship and Liturgical Practice,” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid, 81 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

6. Often the problem is not that the psalm setting is too elaborate, but that the proclamation of the readings is too weak. The need when this is true is not to tone down the psalm but to improve the proclamation.

7. Some resources to help in this regard are Joyce Ann Zimmerman and others, *Living Liturgy: Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, published annually); Kathleen Harmon and others, *Living Liturgy for Cantors* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, published annually); Irene Nowell, *Sing a New Song: The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993); David Haas and others, *Cry Out with Joy*, Year A (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2013), *Cry Out with Joy*, Year B (Chicago: GIA, 2013 and 2014), *Cry Out with Joy*, Year C (Chicago: GIA, 2013, 2014, and 2015), *Cry Out with Joy*, Christmas, Triduum, and Other Solemnities (Chicago: GIA, 2013).

## Chapter 7

1. Robert Cabié, *The Eucharist*, vol. II of *The Church at Prayer*, ed. A.G. Martimort (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 51.

2. While the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Musicam Sacram*, and GIRM grant Gregorian chant “pride of place” because of its distinctive relationship with the Roman Rite, the documents also allow for and encourage new forms of music through which liturgical texts can be expressed for contemporary peoples (CSL 116; MS 9; GIRM 41). *Musicam Sacram* (Instruction on Music in the Liturgy), March 5, 1967.

3. Paul F. Ford, *By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy: A Collection of Unaccompanied Song for Assemblies, Cantors, and Choirs* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

4. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 118: “Religious singing by the faithful is to be skillfully encouraged so that in devotional exercises as well as in liturgical services the voices of the faithful may be heard, in conformity with the norms and requirements of the rubrics.” *Musicam Sacram* 9: “No kind of sacred music is prohibited from liturgical actions by the Church as long as it corresponds to the spirit of the liturgical celebration itself and the nature of its individual parts, and does not hinder the active participation of the people.” GIRM 41: “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.”

5. Published by GIA ([www.giamusic.com](http://www.giamusic.com)) as the Corpus Christi series.

6. Published by Morningstar ([www.morningstarmusic.com](http://www.morningstarmusic.com)) as part of the St. Louis Cathedral Choral series.

7. Published by World Library Publications ([www.wlpmusic.com](http://www.wlpmusic.com)).

8. Published by World Library Publications ([www.wlpmusic.com](http://www.wlpmusic.com)).

9. Published by Oregon Catholic Press ([www.ocp.org](http://www.ocp.org)).

10. Columba Kelly, OSB, “Introducing the *Roman Missal* Antiphons in Your Parish,” *Today’s Liturgy*, Ordinary Time 1 (May 31–August 29, 2015): 14–15.

11. Ken Macek and Paul Tate, *I Have Risen* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2010); *Radiant Light* (Chicago: GIA, 2011); *In the Shadow of God* (Chicago: GIA, 2012).

## Chapter 8

1. “O Lord, Hear My Prayer”; © 1982, 2011, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent.

2. “Take Up Your Cross,” by Charles W. Everest; public domain. Found in most hymnals.

3. “Martha, Mary, Waiting, Weeping,” by Herman G. Stuempfle; © 1997, GIA Publications, Inc. Found in Herman G. Stuempfle, *Redeeming the Time: A Cycle of Song for the Christian Year* (Chicago: GIA Publications,

1997) and in W. Thomas Smith and Robert Batastini, eds., *Hymns for the Gospels* (Chicago: GIA, 2001).

4. “Before the Fruit Is Ripened by the Sun,” by Thomas H. Troeger; © 1985, Oxford University Press, Inc. Found in *Worship* 4th ed. (GIA Publications).

5. “Now We Remain,” by David Haas; ©1983, GIA Publications, Inc. Found in most hymnals.

6. “I Am the Bread of Life/Yo Soy el Pan de Vida,” by Suzanne Toolan, RSM; © 1966, 1970, 1986, 1993, GIA Publications, Inc. Found in most hymnals.

7. “Unless a Grain of Wheat,” by Bernadette Farrell; © 1983, Bernadette Farrell. Found in most hymnals.

8. This document can be found in *The Liturgy Documents, Volume One*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2012).

## Chapter 9

1. *ICEL Resource Collection of Hymns and Service Music for the Liturgy* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1981). This collection contains hymns in the public domain as well as original settings of service music that may be reproduced without charge for use in parishes, schools, and other similar groups.

## Chapter 12

1. David J. Wolpe, *In Speech and in Silence: The Jewish Quest for God* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992), 183.

2. See Bernard Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 18–19.

3. For more on these four levels of silence, see Joyce Ann Zimmerman, CPPS, *Silence: Everyday Living and Praying* (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2010), chap. 3.

4. For fuller discussion of the relationship between silence and music, see Kathleen Harmon, “The Silence of Music,” *Liturgical Ministry* 10 (Spring 2001): 93–100.

## Chapter 13

1. See Mark Searle, “Ritual and Music: A Theory of Liturgy and Implications for Music,” *Assembly* 12:3 (February 1986).

2. Don Saliers, “Liturgical Music Formation,” in *Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning*, ed. Robin A. Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman, CPPS, 392 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).