

Music in Liturgy as an Element of Participation

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INTRODUCTION

In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first fruit of the Second Vatican Council, that “great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20th century” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no.57), the Holy Spirit spoke to the Church, ceaselessly guiding the disciples of the Lord “into all the truth” (Jn. 16:13). This workshop is a good opportunity to rediscover the basic themes of the liturgical renewal that the Vatican Council II Fathers desired, to seek to evaluate their reception, as it were, and to cast a glance at the future.

With the passing of time and in the light of its fruits, the importance of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has become increasingly clear. The Council brilliantly outlined in it the principles on which are based the liturgical practices of the Church and which inspire its healthy renewal in the course of time.

The Council Fathers set the liturgy within the horizon of the history of salvation, whose purpose is the redemption of humanity and the perfect glorification of God. The wonders wrought by God in the Old Testament were but a prelude to the redemption brought to completion by Christ the Lord, especially through the Paschal Mystery of His blessed Passion, His glorious Resurrection from the dead and His glorious Ascension. However, it needs not only to be proclaimed but also to be accomplished; this “is set in train through the sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, SC, no. 6). Christ makes Himself present in a special way in the liturgical gestures associating the Church with Himself. Every liturgical celebration, therefore, is the work of Christ the Priest and of His Mystical Body, “full public worship” (*ibid.*, no. 7) in which the faithful take part, with a foretaste in it of the liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem (*ibid.*, no. 8). This is why the “liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed” and at the same time, “the fount from which all her power flows” (*ibid.*, no. 10).

Sacred Music as an Essential Element in Liturgy

Then with regard to the different elements involved in liturgical celebration, the Constitution pays special attention to the importance of sacred music. The Council praises it, pointing out as its objective: “the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful” (*ibid.*, no. 112). In fact, sacred music is a privileged means to facilitate the active participation of the faithful in sacred celebration, as St Pius X desired to highlight in his *Motu Proprio*, On the Restoration of Sacred Music *Tra le Sollecitudini*. It was this in mind that we need to reassert the need to preserve and to emphasize the role of music at liturgical celebrations, in accordance with the directives of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and being mindful of the liturgy’s real character as well as the sensibility of our time and the musical traditions of the world’s different regions.

Reaffirming the ministerial function of music

The Council Fathers in re-emphasizing the role of music in liturgy stated that;

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.

Holy Scripture, indeed, has bestowed praise upon sacred song, and the same may be said of the fathers of the Church and of the Roman pontiffs who in recent times, led by St. Pius X, have explained more precisely the ministerial function supplied by sacred music in the service of the Lord (SC 112).

Again, the Instruction *Musicam Sacram* reaffirms in the very first paragraph of the prologue that the council was precisely concerned with this question:

Sacred music, in those aspects which concern the liturgical renewal, was carefully considered by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. It explained its role in divine services, issued a number of principles and laws on this subject in the Constitution on the Liturgy, and devoted to it an entire chapter of the same Constitution (MS 1).

In the second paragraph, the instruction presents itself as a response to the question about the ministerial function of the sacred music:

The decisions of the Council have already begun to be put into effect in the recently undertaken liturgical renewal. But the new norms concerning the arrangement of the sacred rites and the active participation of the faithful have given rise to several problems regarding sacred music and its ministerial role. These problems appear to be able to be solved by expounding more fully certain relevant principles of the Constitution on the Liturgy (MS 2).

In liturgy, the ministerial function of a person or a thing is the service that the person or the thing renders to the community. For instance the ministerial function of a reader is to proclaim the reading and that of a chalice is to contain the Eucharistic wine. What then could be the ministerial function of a song in the liturgical celebration? The question of the ministerial function of each song, object, person and even word used in the liturgy is a very essential question. What is your function in the liturgy? What service do you render?

The ministerial function may be defined:

on one hand, in reference to the liturgy itself as understood and interpreted by the Church, according to its tradition and laws; on the other hand, in reference to the assembly that celebrates the mysteries of Christ.¹

In regard to liturgy itself the ministerial function of music can be derived from the general principle given in the *Musicam Sacram*:

The proper arrangement of a liturgical celebration requires the due assignment and performance of certain functions, by which "each person, minister or layman, should carry out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy." This also demands that the meaning and proper nature of each part and of each song be carefully observed. To attain this, those parts especially should be sung which by their very nature require to be sung, using the kind and form of music which is proper to their character (MS 6).

We must realize the ministerial function of each chant. Like a good servant, each song in the liturgy must fulfill the role assigned to it by the liturgy in conformity with the Church's tradition and laws. *The General Instruction to the Roman Missal* says,

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

In regard to the celebrating assembly, a liturgical celebration does not exist in itself. It is lived and participated in by the assembly. It is incarnated in a given assembly and hence its ministerial function must also be judged in this context. The SC marked a decisive stage in the history of the active participation of the people:

¹ Deiss Lucien, *Visions of Liturgy and Music for A New Century*, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1996, p. 6.

To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.

In implementing this, the instruction *Musicam Sacram* adds:

In selecting the kind of sacred music to be used, whether it be for the choir or for the people, the capacities of those who are to sing the music must be taken into account (MS 9).

And again:

In order that the faithful may actively participate more willingly and with greater benefit, it is fitting that the format of the celebration and the degree of participation in it should be varied as much as possible, according to the solemnity of the day and the nature of the congregation present (MS 10).

The faithful fulfil their liturgical role by making that full, conscious and active participation which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself and which is, by reason of baptism, the right and duty of the Christian people (MS 15).

One cannot find anything more religious and more joyful in sacred celebrations than a whole congregation expressing its faith and devotion in song (MS 16).

Therefore, any liturgical chant is to be judged within the context of the celebrating community that sings it.

Ministerial functions of music in liturgy

Liturgical music is central to liturgy. It is an essential part of the public prayer of the Christian community. Music has a ministerial role. It must not dominate the ritual but serve, helping the faithful express and share their faith and strengthen commitment to their faith.

1. Song adds solemnity to the celebration

Liturgical music never dominates, but serves. Sacred music imparts spiritual truth to one's mind, heart, and soul. It displays a dimension of meaning and feeling that mere words cannot. Music makes prayer more pleasing and confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites. Pope Pius X affirms in his *Tra le Sollecitudini*:

Sacred music, being a complementary part of the solemn liturgy, participates in the general scope of the liturgy, which is the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. It contributes to the decorum and the splendor of the ecclesiastical ceremonies, and since its principal office is to clothe with suitable melody the liturgical text proposed for the understanding of the faithful, its proper aim is to add greater efficacy to the text, in order that through it the faithful may be the more easily moved to devotion and better disposed for the reception of the fruits of grace belonging to the celebration of the most holy mysteries (No. 1).

Pius XII, fifty years later adds that:

Sacred music by its very beautiful modulations and its magnificence, must embellish and enhance both the voice of the priest who offers the sacrifice and that of the Christian people who praise the Almighty.²

According to the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, sacred music confers a greater solemnity upon the sacred rites (SC 112). But true solemnity of a liturgical worship does not depend upon a more magnificent ceremonial but on the authenticity of the rites, i.e., celebration is more noble when each participant (preside, reader, psalmist, or assembly) participates according to his/her position. In bringing out the element of solemnity to the one may ask: Does every song that is sung enrich the celebration? Singing must be done with such perfection that the

² AAS 48 (1956) 12.

community is truly edified, i.e., the community is really built up by the celebration. Each time the quality of music is not equal to the quality of the silence it breaks, it is not preferable to sing.

2. *A song adds a greater efficacy to the text*

Music that blends both spiritual and artistic excellence, is liturgical – it is sacred. Such music has the ability to cultivate, strengthen, and deepen the spiritual experience of those gathered for worship. The musical tradition of the Church is a treasure of immeasurable value. Pope Pius X in his *Tra le Solecitudini* states:

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Sacrosanctum Concilium adds that,

Sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites (SC 112).

A song brings out the prayer's tragic beauty. It adds a greater efficacy to the text, hence making it more persuasive. In addition, what happens when a person is touched by the light of liberation and resurrection, and thus comes into contact with Life itself, with Truth and Love? He/she cannot merely speak about it. Speech is no longer adequate. He/she has to sing. The first reference to singing in the Bible comes after the crossing of the Red Sea. Israel has risen out of slavery. It has climbed up from the threatening depths of the sea. It is as if it were reborn. It lives and it is free. The Bible describes the people's reaction to this great event of salvation with the verse: "The people ... believed in the Lord and in Moses his servant" (Ex 14:31). Then comes the second reaction which, with a kind of inner necessity, follows from the first one: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord ..."

3. *Song imbues the liturgy with beauty*

The beauty of song in the liturgy is seen in *Musicam Sacram*:

Indeed, through this form (song) ...minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem (Art. 5).

What a grace it would be if every liturgical celebration opened the door to heaven, if each song uplifted the soul toward the harmony of the invisible realities!

4. *Song helps to create unity*

Song promotes the unity of the assembly since it promotes a sense of congregational unity. Music unifies, since it unites the gathered faithful to Christ and each other. Music has the ministerial role to draw the faithful into the centre of worship, into full, conscious and active participation in a communal ritual action.

When deciding which parts of the Mass are to be sung, preference is given to those which are more important, especially those which the priest, one of his assistants, or a cantor is to sing in alternation with the people, or which all are to sing together. *Musicam Sacram* highlights this fervently:

Through this form (song)... prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices (MS 5).

A gathering of the faithful remains an indeterminate group, a body without a soul, if it does not express its unity in a communal activity. Within the liturgical celebration the communal activities are quite limited: praying with one voice, taking part in procession, giving the sign of peace etc. But it is majorly through song that a deeper unity of heart and soul (Acts 4:32) is experienced as each person joins his/her voice to that of their brothers and sisters. Song therefore creates an assembly from a crowd.

5. *Song creates joy within the celebration*

Singing is an expression of joy. In Colossians 3:16, St. Paul exhorts the faithful assembled in expectation of their Lord's return to sing together. He says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..., singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Our relationship with God is one of love, and whether we sing loudly or softly, on pitch or out of tune, sing! St. Augustine very rightly says that, "it is natural for a lover to sing." We might also remember the ancient proverb that tells us "those who sing pray twice." So sing your praise, your love song, to God – He will surely be pleased.

6. *Music makes the ritual event*

At times, music makes the ritual event (e.g., song of praise at the conclusion of the rite of reconciliation). At other times, music accompanies:

- an action (e.g. during the presentation of the gifts)
- words (e.g. the Gloria)
- an action and words (e.g. the Lamb of God whilst the large host is being broken for distribution).

In such cases where the song is meant to accompany ritual actions it is not independent but serves, rather, to support the prayer of the assembly when an action requires a longer period of time or when the action is going to be repeated several times. The music enriches the moments and keeps it from becoming burdensome. Ritual actions which employ such use of song include: the enrollment of names at the Election of Catechumens; the processions in the celebration of baptism; the vesting and sign of peace at ordination; the presentation of the Bible at the institution of a reader; the anointing of chrism at confirmation and ordination.

Effective liturgical music contributes to good celebrations which "foster and nourish faith" (Music in Catholic Worship, 6). It can be evaluated according to musical, liturgical and pastoral standards.

THE FORM OF SONG

Beyond determining the moments when song is needed, the musical form employed must match its liturgical function.

MUSIC AND THE LITURGICAL YEAR

The mystery of God's love in Christ is so great that a single celebration cannot exhaust its meaning. Over the course of the centuries the various seasons and feasts have developed to express the richness of paschal mystery and of our need to celebrate it. While the liturgy celebrates but one "theme," the dying and rising of Christ, and while Sunday is the original Christian feast, even so the liturgical year shows forth this mystery like so many facets of a resplendent jewel.

Music has been a unique means of celebrating this richness and diversity and of communicating the rhythm of the church year to the assembly. Music enhances the power of the readings and prayer to capture the special quality of the liturgical seasons. What would Christmas be without its carols? How diminished would the fifty-day Easter feast be without the solemn, joyful Alleluia song?

Great care must be shown in the selection of music for seasons and feasts. Contemporary culture seems increasingly unwilling either to prepare for or to prolong Christian feasts and seasons. The Church's pastors and ministers must be aware of cultural phenomena which run counter to the liturgical year or even devalue our feasts and seasons.

MUSIC MINISTRY

The entire worshipping assembly exercises a ministry of music. Some members of the community, however, are recognized for the special gifts they exhibit in leading the musical praise and thanksgiving of Christian assemblies. These are the pastoral musicians, whose ministry is especially cherished by the Church.

PARTICIPANTS IN LITURGICAL SINGING

It is of paramount importance to have the people of God in mind. Before Vatican II Council when one asked "Who celebrates?" the answer was "the priest." But now the response is "the community." Also in the past when one asked "who sings?" the response was "the choir." But today, the response must be "the community." This is the theology found in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. But *Sacrosanctum Concilium* also calls upon the faithful to "a full, conscious and active participation" in the liturgical celebrations. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism (cf. SC 14).

The Presider

The ordained or lay person who presides over the liturgy is also a minister of music. For example, when presiding at the Eucharist, the Bishop or Priest is encouraged to sing some of the greetings, invitations, prayers (especially the Eucharistic Prayer)³ and blessings. During celebrations of the Liturgy of the Hours, the presider is encouraged to chant some of the texts provided. The presider, like other music ministers, always sings in order to add dignity to the liturgical texts and to foster the participation of the assembly in its song of praise to God. As a member of the assembly, the presider's participation in the song serves as a model for the participation of the entire assembly.

The Priest presider

The priest presides in the celebrating community, a community called together in the name of Christ. His position and ministry may be envisaged from a double point of view:

- a) The priest presides in the name of Christ;
- b) The priest presides in the name of the Church.

a) *Presiding in the name of Christ*

The priest presiding in the assembly represents Christ, *in persona Christi*. He is a sacred sign of Christ. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* says, "...the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ..." (SC 33). And *Musicam Sacram* adds,

The priest, acting in the person of Christ, presides over the gathered assembly. Since the prayers which are said or sung by him aloud are proclaimed in the name of the entire holy people and of all present, they should be devoutly listened to by all (MS 14).

b) *Presiding in the name of the Church*

The priest presides in the assembly in the name of the Church, *in persona ecclesiae*. The prayers he makes to God are made in the name of the Church.

Therefore, the most worthy songs are those in which the priest presents the prayers of the whole ecclesial community to the Father, through the mediation of his Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, i.e., the prayers and the preface.

- i) The singing of Prayers

These are the presidential prayers. They are proclaimed in the name of the community by the one who presides over her prayers. The text should be solemnized with a simple and clear diction. In singing the prayers, one

³ See *GIRM*, nos. 147, 218.

should ask: Does cantillation really help the prayer? Does it help the community to understand the text? Does it clothe the text with a splendid garment? Or does the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem? When human beings come before the majesty of God and, as beggars, stretch out their hands towards God's tenderness, they clothe their words with a solemn gravity. Does my cantillation bring out this sense?

ii) The singing of Preface

A short dialogue happens in the Mass just after the prayer over the gifts and the before the singing of the Sanctus. It is called the "preface dialogue" and it is really quite remarkable in its sweeping vision and heavenly call.

Coming before the Eucharistic Prayer the preface should be like a cry of joy and gratitude for the salvation that the Father gives us in his Son. The preface is certainly a perfect theology. Part of the reason we miss its significance is that the translation of the Latin is difficult to accomplish in English.

What is the celebrant really inviting us to do? After greeting us in the Lord he invites us to go to heaven! But remember the priest is in *persona Christi*. Hence when he speaks it is really the Lord Jesus who speaks making use of the voice of the priest. And what does the Lord really say to us in the magnificent dialogue and preface that follows?

Let your hearts be taken up! Come and go with me to the altar that is in heaven where Jesus, the great High Priest, with all the members of his body render perfect thanks to God the Father! They are no longer on earth, their hearts have been swept aloft into the great liturgy of heaven! By the power of his words the members are able to go up higher! Since they have been raised to new life in Christ, they are to seek the things that are above where Christ sits at his Father's right hand. They are to go up now and enter the heavenly liturgy.

The congregation's response is meant to be a joyful acknowledgment and acceptance of the Lord's action in summoning it to the heavenly liturgy.

The Assembly

The primary minister of music is the assembly itself. Every member of the assembly is called to participate in the liturgy by way of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons and other songs.⁴ With the support of competent music ministers, the entire assembly is enabled to voice its song of praise to the God of salvation. By joining their voices in song the members of the assembly express their unity in Christ,⁵ acclaim Christ's presence in word and sacrament, and exercise their baptismal priesthood, offering a living sacrifice of praise to God.

Director of Music Ministry

A competent director of music ministry coordinates the efforts of all music ministers within the community. The director, who must possess a good knowledge of music and the liturgy, is responsible for the selection of music for all liturgical celebrations and for the training and on-going formation of the music ministers who serve the community. Frequently, the director of music ministry is also the choir director.

The Cantor

The principal role of the cantor is to proclaim God's Word by singing the verses of the psalm⁶ and to elicit the assembly's response. This ministry is exercised at the ambo from which God's Word is proclaimed. Frequently, the cantor will also sing the invocations during litanies and the intercessions during the Universal Prayer. Where it is permitted in the liturgical books, the cantor may also sing texts normally sung by the priest or deacon (e.g., the Easter proclamation). Because of the unique ministry which the cantor exercises, in addition to musical skills

⁴ See *GIRM*, nos. 36, 37, 40; *SC*, nos. 30, 114.

⁵ See *Music in Christian Liturgies Document II [Universa Laus]* (May 2002), no. 2.12, in *Music and Liturgy*. *JSSG*, Issue 313, vol. 30/1 (Spring 2004) page 22.

⁶ See *SC*, no. 102; *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, no. 56.

the cantor must have acknowledge of the scriptures and understand the place of the psalms and biblical canticles in the liturgy.

The Choir

Choirs exercise a distinct ministry within the liturgy and are, therefore, to be diligently promoted. Most often the choir provides leadership by supporting the song of the assembly.⁷ Sometimes the choir enhances the people's song with harmony and descants. At other times the choir will alternate with the assembly. Occasionally, the choir alone will sing works that are beyond the competence of the assembly to sing, but which, nevertheless, enrich its prayer. At all times, the choir is part of the assembly and enriches its prayer.⁸

Organist and Other Instrumentalists

The organist and other instrumentalists provide the primary support for the song of the assembly and the other music ministers. At particular moments in the liturgy, instrumentalists can add a note of festivity, lend dignity or create a meditative atmosphere for the people's prayer. Like all ministers of music, instrumentalists are not primarily performers, but rather servants of the Church's prayer.

"During Advent the organ and other musical instruments should be used with a moderation that reflects the character of this season, but does not anticipate the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. During Lent the playing of the organ and musical instruments is allowed only to support the singing. *Laetare* Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities, and feasts are exceptions to this rule."⁹

The Leader of Song

Ideally, the assembly is led by the accompanist in its songs, acclamations and responses. However, a leader of song may announce the hymns and support the singing of the assembly as required. While it is fitting to have a leader of song even when a choir is present, it is always desirable to have a leader of song when there is no choir to support the song of the assembly.¹⁰ A careful use of the microphone will ensure that the voice of the leader of song does not overpower or in any way inhibit the singing of the assembly. The leader of song does not stand at the ambo, but rather at another place which is visible to the assembly. In some cases the leader of song also serves as the cantor.

Music and Logos"

Not every kind of music can have a place in Christian worship. It has its standards, and that standard is the Logos. If we want to know whom we are dealing with, the Holy Spirit or the unholy spirit, we have to remember that it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to say, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3). The Holy Spirit leads us to the *Logos*, and he leads us to a music that serves the *Logos* as a sign of the *sursum corda*, the lifting up of the human heart. Important question to be asked: Does the music used in liturgy integrate man by drawing him to what is above, or does it cause his disintegration into formless intoxication or mere sensuality? That is the criterion for a music in harmony with *logos*, a form of that *logikélatreia* (reason-able, *logos*-worthy worship).¹¹

INFO

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⁷ See *GIRM*, no. 103.

⁸ See *GIRM*, no. 312.

⁹ *GIRM*, no. 313.

¹⁰ See *GIRM*, no. 104; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, *Musicam sacram* (March 5, 1967) no. 21.

¹¹ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 151.