

## Singing the Sunday Liturgy

For thousands of years the Church has been singing. Some of the words and tunes and instruments have changed, but ever since the Resurrection of Christ (and even before) those who gather to worship have been instructed to sing. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes this clear. "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than any other art. The main reason for this preeminence is that, as sacred song closely bound to the text, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy" (CSL #112). And today too, the revised GIRM tells us that singing is of "great importance" in the celebration of the Mass. Why? Singing makes us part of a communal prayer that is ancient and larger than ourselves. It is something we do together. When we sing together we pray even more strongly.

Specifically, the GIRM says this: "...every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and holy days of obligation" (GIRM #40). So, how do we determine what to sing? The Church provides us with a guideline called "progressive solemnity." This simply means that some parts of the Mass are more important and significant than others and therefore should be sung.

First, the Church tells us that the Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia) and the Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations (Sanctus/Holy, Memorial Acclamation and Amen) are most important. Why? Because they emphasize the two most important parts of the Mass: the Gospel and the Eucharistic Prayer and these parts of the Mass reveal Christ's presence in his word and sacrament. These acclamations should be sung at every Mass (even weekdays). The texts for these acclamations are given by the Church and may not be changed.

Ranking next in solemnity are the two processional hymns: the Gathering Song and Communion Song. Why are these important? Because joining our voices together in song helps us to experience community and union with one another and with God. The Gathering Song helps us to become a community, and the Communion Song expresses our union with Christ and one another through the union of our voices. The entire assembly is called to sing these songs on Sundays and holy days.

Following in solemnity is the Responsorial Psalm. Singing the Responsorial Psalm can be a challenge to both music ministers and the assembly because the psalm changes every day. To facilitate its singing the Church provides the option of a seasonal psalm. This allows the assembly to learn one psalm that can be sung throughout an entire liturgical season. The Responsorial Psalm should be sung at Sunday and holy day liturgies.

Further down the list are "ordinary chants," such as the Kyrie Eleison/Lord Have Mercy, Gloria/Glory to God, Lord's Prayer, Agnus Dei/Lamb of God, and Profession of Faith. These may or may not be sung, depending on the solemnity of the Mass and the nature of the liturgical season.

Finally, there are supplementary songs: during the preparation of gifts, a song of praise after communion, and the recessional song. These should be considered of lesser solemnity and may or may not be sung.

The Church calls us to active participation in the entire liturgy. Singing those parts of the Mass that are most important helps us achieve this participation, and enables us to experience the presence of God among us. Just as the first followers of Jesus gathered to sing psalms and hymns, we too, unite our voices in songs of praise to our God.