

# Singing the Liturgy

## Liturgy of the Word

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The Liturgy of the Word takes place after the Opening Prayer of the Mass. This “opening prayer” in fact brings a conclusion to the Introductory Rites, which were examined in part 1 of this series.

The Liturgy of the Word consists of:

- First Reading, usually from the Old Testament, but in Easter time and on some other solemnities, from the Acts of the Apostles
- Responsorial Psalm
- Second Reading, from the New Testament. This is usually from the letters of the apostles (what used to be called the “epistle”) or from the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse)
- The verse before the Gospel, with “Alleluia” – except in Lent, when an alternative acclamation is used

[The hymn or Sequence after the second reading and before the Gospel Acclamation is compulsory on Easter Sunday and Pentecost]

- The Gospel
- The Homily (compulsory on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; recommended during special seasons, and on other feasts and occasions)
- The Profession of Faith (The Creed)
- The General Intercessions, or Prayer of the Faithful

The Liturgy of the Word seems quite straightforward as to what should be sung: the psalm after the first reading and the acclamation before the Gospel. The Creed may be sung, as may the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful.

### The Psalm

In the old Jewish Temple and Synagogue worship, the religious “songs” of the people were the psalms of David. To these can be added some other Old Testament or New Testament songs, usually called “Canticles” (eg, the Canticle of Mary – know as the Magnificat). Their nature,

as songs, demands that they should be sung. Most parishes are aware of the musical importance of the psalm: it is our response to, and reflection on, the reading which has just been proclaimed. It is also *our* prayer, and an inspired prayer, since coming from the scriptures it is the word of God, given to us so that we may fittingly praise that same God. In a few instances, some of our English language strophic hymns are paraphrases of the psalm text (eg. “The Lord’s My Shepherd”) and may be used as our response. But it is not permitted to replace the psalm with a non-biblical hymn: it is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word, and if not sung, then it is to be recited<sup>1</sup>. In New Zealand we are steadily (if slowly) employing the Responsorial method, where the Cantor (“Psalmist), or small group, or choir, sings the verses of the psalm to a formulaic chant or tone, while the congregation answers with a response set to a simple melody. Many locally composed collections and resources are available; check with the Auckland Diocesan Liturgy Centre.

It is worth remembering that a set of psalms and responses has been issued for the different seasons of the year for optional use – so that the same

psalm may be used throughout the season instead of the psalm of the Sunday.

### Sequences

On Easter Sunday and Pentecost, a “Sequence” or hymn follows the second reading. These are obligatory and are respectively, the *Victimae Paschali Laudes* and the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*<sup>2</sup>. Our English Hymns, *Bring All Ye Dear-Bought Nations, Bring and Holy Spirit Lord of Light* are translations of the Latin, and may be sung by all, highlighting the special nature of the Liturgy of these days. (Both can be found in the Living Parish Hymnal) Chant settings for both – in English – also exist. As they are obligatory, they should be entirely recited by all if not sung.

### The Verse Before The Gospel

- “Alleluia” outside Lent, and an alternative Acclamation during Lent.

Of its nature, “Alleluia” with its verse should be sung: it is the welcome song to the Good News of the Gospel to be proclaimed. All stand during the chanting of this greeting. So much is it regarded as a “should be sung”, that if this is not possible, then it may be omitted<sup>3</sup>.

Most parishes in New Zealand have adopted the mode of singing the "Alleluia": numerous "Alleluia" settings with a short musical formula for singing the verse by the Cantor/ small group/choir are readily to hand. To prevent predictability setting in, I would suggest that the tunes for the "Alleluia" and its versicle be changed to mark the season. Thus the Easter Season, Sundays of the Year and Advent would be marked by a change of the "Alleluia", with Lent having its own special acclamation. (See Appendix A)

*... singing of this Creed melody had almost become a badge of the Catholic faith ...*

On Solemnities and major feasts, the proclamation of the Gospel can be dramatically highlighted: incense is put into the thurible, the priest takes the Book of the Gospels from the altar and, holding it aloft, processes to the lectern, preceded by the thurifer and flanked by two candle bearers. At St Joseph's in Dunedin, on these occasions, all this occurs while the Alleluia and verse are sung. Once this

is finished, the priest (or deacon) chants the introduction to the gospel in the same key, using the Gregorian tone of a minor third drop interval. The whole congregation replies:  
V *The Lord be with you.*  
R *And also with you.*  
V *A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to —*  
R *Glory to you, Lord!*

An organ fanfare follows while the Book of the Gospels is incensed on the Lectern. (Clouds of incense, please!) The Gospel is proclaimed as usual, but at its conclusion, the priest holds the book high and chants:  
V *This is the Gospel of the Lord*  
R *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!*

A second fanfare from the organ follows as the servers depart, and the people sit in readiness for the homily. After the homily, there may be a period of silent reflection before the Profession of Faith is recited.

#### Should the Creed Be Sung?

Twenty five years ago, the creed could be heard throughout New Zealand, sung to the Latin version known as Credo III (because it was the third melody printed in the Liber Usualis). Everyone knew the chant:

indeed the singing of this Creed melody had almost become a badge of the Catholic faith (especially at the words "Et unam, Sanctam, Catholicam et Apostolicam Ecclesiam!") Credo III is still sung throughout Europe, and always used at St Peter's Basilica, Rome.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (#44) notes that the profession of faith may be recited or sung, but seems to presume that singing will be the norm, and directs that when sung, priest and people "are to sing it together, or in alternation" In no 19, under the heading, "The Importance of Singing", the GIRM specifically urges that the faithful "know how to sing at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass, in Latin, *especially* (emphasis mine) the Profession of Faith and the Lord's Prayer."

It seems obvious to me that we in New Zealand should maintain the Catholic tradition of singing the Creed at Mass. We may have to wait for a good English singing version until the text – at present under revision – is finalized. In the meantime, we could prevent Credo III (in Latin) from being lost to the younger generation through

lack of use. The text and music would both have to be available to congregations to encourage, once again, that full participation of old. Some catechesis is called for, as is teaching the congregation to bow at the words "by the power of the Holy Spirit..." We have abolished the genuflection (which is still obligatory on Christmas and the Feast of the Annunciation to remind us of the great mystery of the Incarnation) without teaching our people how to bow. Perhaps our New Zealand Liturgists could give some direction and a lead on these points.

Permission can be granted, on occasion, to substitute the text of the "Apostles' Creed" for the longer Nicene Creed. A very singable Taize chant version of the Apostles' Creed has been published, with a Cantor/ Soloist singing the sections of the text, interspersed with a memorable congregational refrain (involving optional trumpet!) set to the words "Credo in unum Deum..."

It is interesting to note in passing, that a set of "Guidelines for Music at Mass" was published in 1978 for the (then) four Dioceses of New Zealand, under the authority of the New

Zealand Bishops' Conference. In these guidelines it was stated: "It is hoped that the Latin Gregorian Credo III will always be familiar to New Zealand Catholics". In the intervening 25 years, we have forgotten much of our heritage.

### The General Intercessions

In New Zealand these are generally referred to as "the prayers of the faithful". The priest introduces these, inviting the congregation to pray. The intercessions or intentions are given out by the reader (or deacon or cantor) and after a pause or silent prayer, the assembly expresses its supplication with a response. The priest says the concluding prayer.

The recent ceremonies, televised live, of funeral rites for the late Pope John Paul II and the Installation Mass of Benedict XVI have reminded us that the Church in Rome takes for granted that the General Intercessions will be chanted by a Cantor (the singer was not wearing a Deacon's regalia) with the congregation joining in a sung response. This was also the case at the two outdoor Masses in Auckland and Christchurch during Pope John Paul's visit to New Zealand. Yet, nowadays in this country, readers are usually

selected from a roster of parishioners, or, at ceremonial Masses, representatives of a group within the parish/assembly; and moreover, chosen for their reading rather than singing ability!

### *... There is a middle way between the options of said or sung prayers ...*

There is a "middle way" between the options of said or sung prayers of the faithful, and it is that the petitions are *recited* by the reader, with the response *sung* by the congregation. This happens according to the following description, and was the method used at Westminster Cathedral, London, during the solemn Requiem Mass for the late Cardinal Hume:

After the introduction by the priest/celebrant:

- The reader gives out the petition
- A pause for silent prayer follows
- The reader continues: "Let us pray to the Lord"
- A cantor, (or small group) immediately sings "Lord in your mercy" (in the appropriate pitch)
- The whole congregation continues:

"hear our prayer".

If the congregation is totally familiar with this sequence, and the sung response, the choir/cantors can gradually add harmony and faux bourdons (descants) to the melody of the response. The intensifying effect of this buildup, as the petitions continue, certainly highlights the fact that here are "the faithful, the people, exercising their priestly function, interceding for all humanity"<sup>4</sup> (See Appendix B)

### Conclusion

The priest recites the concluding prayer of the general intercessions. This brings to an end the Liturgy of the Word, a part of the Mass which presumes mental concentration, reflection and response, requiring participation both interior and exterior, urging an internal assent to the Word which has been proclaimed and developed in the truths of faith and which demands an active involvement in the real and present needs of the Church, the World, and the local community. Following upon this burst of mental activity and involvement, it is little wonder that Liturgists suggest that the next section of the Mass - the Preparation - be a period of repose for the congregation.

### Endnotes

*The previous article makes reference to sections of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM). A later edition (2002) of this document has relocated the references given. These new references are given in brackets, to aid in cross-referencing.*

<sup>1</sup> GIRM nos 36,39 [57,61]

<sup>2</sup> GIRM 40 [64]

<sup>3</sup> GIRM 39 [63c]

<sup>4</sup> GIRM 45 [69]

*NB. The 4th Edition of the Liturgy Documents, available from the Liturgy Centre, contains the US version of GIRM 2002.*

### Correction

Following the 2 appendices is a corrected version of the Penitential Rite by Michael McConnell, published on page 26 of our last issue. The editor apologises for mistakes in computer transposition of the score, which led to, as the composer put it, "a wildly atonal result"!

We have now upgraded our programs, so that future occasions of the editor's tone-deafness should not impact on our publication.

# Lenten Acclamation & Versicle

(Appendix A)

Acclamation

(A.G.M., Harmonies MFMCC)

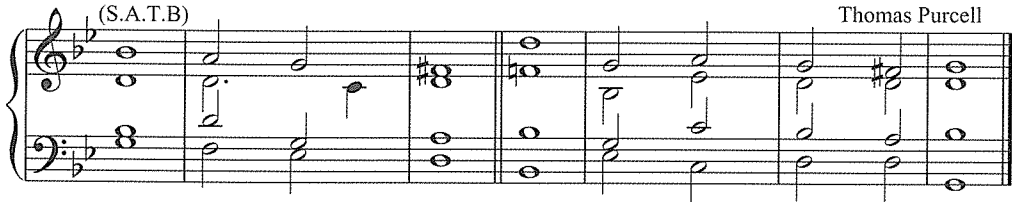


GLO - RY AND PRAISE TO YOU, LORD\_ JE - SUS CHRIST

Verse

(S.A.T.B)

Thomas Purcell



**Lent I**  
We do not live on | bread a- | lone, || but on every word that | comes from the | mouth of God.

**Lent II**  
From the shining cloud the Father's | voice is | heard: || this is my be- | lov-èd | Son \* hear | him.

**Lent III**  
Lord, you are truly the saviour | of the | world: || give me living water, that I may | ne-ver | thirst a | -gain.

I do not wish the sinner to die, | says the | Lord, || but | turn to | me and | live.

Your words, Lord, are | spirit. and | life; || You have the words of | ev-er | last-ing | life.

**Lent IV**  
I am the light of the world, | says the | Lord: || Those who follow me will | have the light of | life.

God loved the world so much that he gave his | on-ly | Son, || that all who believe in him might | have e- | ter-nal | life.

I will rise and go to my | father, and | tell him: || Father, I have sinned against heaven | and a- | gainst | you.

**Lent V**  
I am the resurrection and the life, | says the Lord; || Those who believe in me | will not | die for- | ever.

If you serve me, follow me | says the | Lord; || and where I am, my | servant will | al-so | be.

I hope in the Lord, I | trust in His | word; || with Him there is mercy, and | fullness | of re- | demption.

*These Acclamations may be freely photocopied for use*

(Appendix B)

# Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions)

After each intercession, the reader pauses for silent prayer, and then continues:  
"Let us pray to the Lord:"

*cantors immediately intone*

*and all respond*



Lord, in your mer\_ cy hear our\_ prayer

The response can be harmonized:



Hear our prayer

Descants may be added successively to each intercession:



Hear our prayer

*Arr. MFMCC, 2004. May be freely photocopied for use*

# PENITENTIAL RITE

Michael F. McConnell

Lord Jesus, your  
covenant brings \* life and salvation: Ky-ri- e e- le- i- son. Ky-ri- e e- le- i- son.

Christ Jesus, you  
share your life with \* us in baptism: Chri ste e- le- i- son. Chri- ste e- le- i- son.

Lord Jesus, your  
victory over sin is \* our salvation: Ky- ri- e e- le- i- son. Ky- ri- e e- le- i- son.

May almighty God \* forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

(A paradigm setting for the texts of Penitential Rite III. The text used is one approved by the American Bishops' Conference, but the setting is easily adapted to the texts in English as set out in the Missal)

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