

# Singing the Liturgy

## The Communion Rite

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### The Communion Rite

This rite of the Mass commences after the "Great Amen" of the Eucharistic Prayer. It consists of:

- The Lord's Prayer
- The Rite of Peace
- The Breaking of the Bread, and the Commingling (during which the *Lamb of God* is sung)
- The Communion of the priest and the faithful
- Time of thanksgiving after Communion

For many years, New Zealand parishes have simply recited the Lord's Prayer (Our Father), the priest's embolism and the people's doxology ("For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory..."). As a result, I have heard some people assert

that it is "unliturgical" nowadays to sing this prayer! Alas for the liturgical education of the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand!

The tradition of the Church presumes that the Lord's Prayer will be sung; indeed, the traditional Gregorian Chant of the Pater Noster is one of the parts of the Mass (in Latin) which the GIRM expressly urges should be known by all the faithful.<sup>1</sup> It can either be sung at any Mass in English, especially where it is known and appreciated by the congregation. Douglas Mews' setting of the traditional English text was widely

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used throughout New Zealand. A setting to the traditional words is included in the Dwyer Missal. However, most Dioceses in New Zealand have adopted the ELCC translation - the so-called "Ecumenical Version". It is ironic that at most ecumenical gatherings, for the sake of uniformity, the traditional text is resorted to! (This may be saying something to those who have ears to hear.)

An arrangement for this translation, for congregation (or SATB Choir) by myself has been published,<sup>2</sup> and a setting gaining wide popularity with congregations in the South has been composed by Helen Mulheron of Oamaru.

The Our Father, the following embolism of the priest, and the concluding doxology by the people should all be sung as a complete unit. When this is done, it creates a powerful focus on the rite of peace and the Breaking of Bread which follows the Lord's Prayer. In apostolic times, the Breaking of the Bread by Christ at the last supper gave the entire Eucharistic action its name.<sup>3</sup>

The dialogue between priest and people which precedes the sign of peace ("The peace of the Lord be with you always - And also with you") is one of those to which preference should be given as regards singing.<sup>4</sup>

### The Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)

It is a sign of our progress that no-one would think it strange to sing this text these days. Most parishes have more than one setting, of which those of Douglas Mews and Marty Haugen (Mass of Creation) are perhaps the most common. If the Breaking of the Bread is somewhat prolonged (e.g. when a large number of priests concelebrate on a special occasion) then the invocation may be repeated as often as necessary to accompany the action.

Some settings of "Fraction Rite Litanies" add other invocations as well. However, the final reprise should conclude with: "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace".<sup>5</sup>

### The Communion Song

According to the GIRM, this is to begin when the priest receives the Body of Christ. The Roman Lit-

urgy presumes that the Communion Antiphon as published in the Missal will be the people's refrain as a psalm chanted by the Cantor or Choir, sung by all as they move to receive Communion from the priest and ministers. (If there is no singing, this antiphon is to be recited by all as the priest is receiving Communion.)

Composers have not, in general, directed their talents to setting these texts to music; the texts themselves are under revision as to translation; and the New Zealand practice is to approach the Sanctuary for Communion in personal prayer and silence. In churches which retain a choir, this is one of the times at Mass when a motet is sung. If there is no choir, then often the organist or music group will play meditative music. Personally, I do not see this as a "retrograde" practice, but I acknowledge that the implementation of the "Communion Song" is an issue which needs to be addressed by both Liturgists and Musicians. "Suitable songs approved by the conference of Bishops" may be sung "by the Choir alone, or by choir/cantor with the congregations".<sup>6</sup>

After the Communion of the people, there may be a time for silent prayer, and if desired, a hymn of praise, or a psalm, may be sung as a thanksgiving. Many New Zealand parishes opt for a "thanksgiving hymn" at this point.

The prayer after Communion by the priest, and the people's *Amen*, conclude the Communion Rite.

# *Singing the Liturgy*

## The Dismissal Rite

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### **The Dismissal Rite**

This rite of the Mass follows the Communion Rite, and consists of:

- The priest's greeting and people's response
- The Blessing (on special occasions, this is given in an expanded or solemn form)
- The Dismissal of the Assembly

There is no mention of a final or "recessional" hymn in the GIRM.

In the foreword to the Sing Praise Hymnal (published 1980), "Guidelines for Music at Mass" were published. Under the heading "The Dismissal Rite" it is stated:

"Within our [New Zealand] culture, to sing the blessing or anything else in this rite would seem artificial and contrived."

Well, that was then, and this is now, and we have come a long way in 25 years. Many priests now sing the jubilant dismissal with Alleluias on Easter Day, and during Easter Week, and the whole congregation joyfully responds.

All liturgists agree that there is no need for a final hymn: a rousing organ voluntary would serve just as well to cover the procession of priest and ministers from the church, (except in Lent, when a departure in silence would emphasise the penitential nature of the season). Why, then, is it almost universal practice in Aotearoa New Zealand to make the people remain and sing a hymn after they have been dismissed?

### **To sing or not to sing a Recessional Hymn?**

The reasoning goes that it "just does not feel that Mass has ended" without a recessional hymn. I

would argue that this unfinished feeling arises simply because we do not sing the Dismissal Rite; we are still in the mindset of singing *at* Mass, instead of singing the Mass.

Consider:

- after Communion, allow time for silence so that all may make their personal thanksgiving. (40 years ago, half the church would remain in their pews after the priest had left the altar to “make their thanksgiving”, and the priest himself, after unvesting, would return to the sanctuary to complete the *Gratiarum Actio post Missam*.)
- the silent Thanksgiving time should be deep, meditative, a palpable. Let the silence speak!
- when the time of silence is completed, a hymn of praise is sung by all. (This would be the second, and final, hymn sung at Mass.)
- the prayer after Communion is chanted by the priest with all singing the *Amen*.
- parish notices are given out if necessary.

- the Dismissal Rite is sung by the priest, with the people replying: the *Amen* at the blessing can be extended, and after the sung dismissal itself by the priest, the people respond with a rousing “Thanks be to God!” And the Mass would be seen, and heard, and “felt” to be finished. (see appendix)
- an organ or instrumental voluntary is played while the priest and ministers leave the church and the faithful disperse.

I look forward to the time when we have the courage to sing the Liturgy, and do away with the Recessional Hymn.

In the intervening forty-five years since the liturgical reforms of Vatican Council II, we have experienced a period of exciting - and sometimes bewildering - changes. Some of our liturgical experiments have not been wise or well-grounded. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote that, through the liturgy, “we must be led toward the essential action that happens in the liturgy, towards the transforming power of God who wants, through what happens in the liturgy, to

transform us and the world.” (The Spirit of the Liturgy, 2000).

The now Pope Benedict XVI has also called for a “new liturgical movement which will call to life the real heritage of the Second Vatican Council”. (Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977)

We have come a long way since 1965, and achieved much: there is still much which remains to be done. If we return to our roots of the Roman liturgy (and this is the thrust of liturgists and liturgy seminars in our time), then I am confident that the renewed liturgy called for by Vatican Council II will blossom and flourish in Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### End notes

- 1) General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), 4th Edition, 1975, no. 19
- 2) Available at \$5.00 per copy through the Auckland Diocesan Liturgy Centre
- 3) GIRM no. 56c
- 4) GIRM no. 19
- 5) GIRM no. 56e
- 6) GIRM no. 56i

