

Singing the Liturgy

The Introductory Rites

Recent music and Liturgy Seminars in this country have stressed that New Zealand parishes and congregations should focus their energies on “singing the mass”, rather than concentrating on hymns and other pieces to sing at mass.

Those who still remember the sung Latin liturgy will understand what is being emphasised. It is possible for the vernacular Catholic Liturgy to be celebrated in song without the use of hymns, which remain an “optional extra”.

Shortly after the promulgation of the *Novus Ordo*, the Sacred Congregation of Rites issued a document on Sacred Music in the Liturgy which recommended, in a ranked order, those parts of the mass to be sung.

Heading the list were the simple dialogues between the celebrant and the congregation, eg. greetings and

responses, the dialogue at the beginning of the Preface, and the Acclamations in the Eucharistic prayer.

These were, and still are, described as “being of special value, being outward signs of the Community’s celebration, and a means of greater communion between priest and people, creating a degree of active participation, and expressing clearly the involvement of the entire community” (GIRM, 4th Ed, 1975, no. 14,15,19).

In the New Zealand of the 1970s, we largely ignored this recommendation. (The overwhelming problem was to get

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our congregations to sing anything at all!) Instead, we concentrated both on introducing hymns at mass and searching for suitable English settings of the “Lord have mercy”, “Holy, holy, holy” and “Lamb of God” (the traditional “Mass Setting” mindset), while the memorial acclamations were largely ignored, and the “Glory to God” and responsorial psalm were put in the “too hard” basket.

In the English-speaking world, musical problems were compounded by the uncertainty of an interim translation of the official text, which was not finalised until 1973.

In the subsequent 25 years since then, we have come a long way. Perhaps now, the implementation of the Sacred Congregation’s recommendations does not seem too far fetched. In urging that we “sing the mass”, our NZ liturgists are advising us to go back to our roots in celebrating the Roman liturgy as it is officially presented to us. I, for one, welcome this approach, since it seems to me that we in New Zealand, with our “straight-forward-no-fuss-ordinary-Kiwi: approach, have lost something of the

Catholic liturgical spirit.

The Introductory Rites

These consist of¹:

- a) the Entrance Song
- b) the Greeting (which should be the Liturgical greeting, not a cheery “good morning everyone” by the celebrant!)
- c) the Penitential Rite
Which may be the “I confess” followed by the “Lord, have Mercy”; one of the alternative Penitential Rite Litanies incorporating the “Lord, have mercy”; or the rite of sprinkling the people with Holy Water (the ‘Asperges’)
- d) the “Glory to God” (omitted in the seasons of Advent and Lent)
- e) the Opening prayer (the ‘Collect’)

The Opening Prayer contains the Introductory Rites, which prepare us for the Liturgy of the Word.

The Entrance Song

The various individuals who make up the Congregation have to become a worshipping community. The song (in New Zealand and overseas usually a

strophic hymn approved by the Conference of Bishops) gathers the people into a unity as it opens the celebration. It should be chosen so as to focus on the season, the feast, or the theme of the readings of the mass of the day; i.e. It sets the tone of the celebration while accompanying the procession of priest and “ministers”. Most NZ parishes will include the servers, lay readers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist in this procession. It would be good to see a more widespread inclusion of incense – with a thurifer – in this procession for our main Sunday celebration, for surely this is included in the overall meaning of “celebration”?

The entrance song and procession are together a visible and audible statement that we gather in the name of Christ, renewing our commitment to Him and each other, as we re-forge the links which unite us as “family” in the mystical body of Christ.

What of the “Entrance Antiphon” as given in our Sunday missals?

This was envisaged as the “official” entrance song, like the introit of the old

Latin liturgy. The antiphon, (sung by all, or by choir and all alternately, or by choir alone) would be interspersed with verses of its accompanying psalm (sung by cantors) to cover the duration of the procession.

Alas, very few musicians have turned their attention to these texts. No musical form has evolved which enables congregations to participate, and the very texts themselves may be under review in the as-yet unpublished edition of the Roman Missal. The singing of these official chants remains very definitely a task for a future generation!

Its substitution for an (approved) hymn is a permissible, and workable, variant.²

However, the weight given to the place of this entrance antiphon is evident in that it is to be recited by the faithful (usually lead by the reader) in masses where there is no singing (eg weekdays). Otherwise, it is to be recited by the priest himself after the greeting.³

In some overseas cathedrals which retain choirs expert in Gregorian chant,

¹ General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) no. 24

^{2,3} GIRM no. 26

the full Introit from the old 'Liber Usualis' is still chanted as a processional, with the translation printed in the Congregational mass leaflet. Not for the ordinary New Zealand parish church! This usage also seems to limit the participation of the congregation to an interior meditative mode, though many argue that this is still "active participation".

... participation is raised to the next level by chanting this praise of the Lord while imploring his mercy...

The Greeting

As recommended by the sacred congregation of rites (see above) this should be sung (i.e. chanted). If celebrants were to chant "The Lord be with you" to the simple old Latin tone, they would be surprised (and perhaps edified) to hear the whole congregation volubly reply "And also with you". It happens in some places!

The brief introduction to the masses of the day which follows would be spoken, with the advantage that the attention of the congregation has been captured.

The Penitential Rite

Most NZ parishes are now accustomed to singing a simple setting of the "Lord have mercy" after the Confiteor (I confess) is said, and the Absolution by the celebrant given. However, many priests use one of the alternative forms.

Do we sing these alternative penitential rite litanies? We should: the litanic responses "Lord have mercy", "Christ have mercy" achieve full impact only when chanted. Chant settings of these texts are printed in the Roman Missal itself (in English) and reproduced in the Sunday Missal approved for Australia and New Zealand published by EJ Dwyer and Co.

Many priests welcome and use the variations given in these alternative penitential texts: I look forward to the day when our participation is raised to the next level by chanting this praise of the Lord while imploring his mercy. As the GIRM states (no 19) "In choosing the parts actually to be sung, preference should be given ... especially to those to be sung by the priest or ministers with the congregation responding, or by the priest and people together." (See Appendix B).

The Rite of Sprinkling with Holy Water

As stated above, this is an alternative to the penitential rite. It is still thoroughly familiar to NZ congregations. The celebrant blesses the water, and then moves through the congregation sprinkling the members with the holy water.

All should cross themselves as they receive the water (some still genuflect as well). A song accompanies this action – the Asperges: in the original Latin, if your congregation remembers this. An English version to the same tune exists, which may be easily learnt if led by two cantors. (See appendix 2). A concluding prayer ends this rite, which retains a very penitential character with self-evident symbolism. In the seasons of Advent and Lent, when the "Glory to God" is omitted, it seems natural to substitute and highlight this form of the penitential rite. [Other suitable songs can be used, eg two verses of "Come to the Water" or "Come back to me with all your heart"].

During the Easter season, the sprinkling takes on a festive aspect as

we recall the events of our salvation and our rebirth with the waters of baptism. Douglas Mews' setting of "Lo, I saw water flowing from the temple" is very effective at this time.

Glory to God in the Highest

Only the official text should be used, as this is "the ancient hymn of the Church, assembled in the Holy Spirit, [which] praises and entreats the Father and the Lamb."⁴ It is historically called the "Greater Doxology" or "the Angels' Hymn". Of its nature, it should be sung at our solemn Sunday celebrations. We have just implored God for mercy: we now burst into praise for that mercy already freely given. This hymn is described in the GIRM (no. 17) as an independent rite or act. That is to say, priest and people join together in the song which does not accompany any other rite or liturgical action, such as the entrance song or the 'Lamb of God' at the breaking of the bread. This hymn stands alone.

It is a sign of our progress that parishes no longer regard singing the "Glory to God" as an impossible pipe-dream. Many parishes have more than one setting, of which many examples

⁴ GIRM no. 31

are in use: Douglas Mews' eminently singable version, John Rutter's simple unison congregation setting from his "Communion Service" (published RSCM) and Dr Vernon Griffith's very musical setting, to name but three.

There also exist settings in which "less able" congregations join in a repeated refrain: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth" while the rest of the text is sung by choir or cantors. A competent organist is required to give a firm lead. We have reached the stage that if the Gloria is not sung during the permitted seasons, then we feel that something is lacking in our celebration. It is akin to the shock we would experience if, at a national gathering, (because there were no good singers present) we simply recited "God of nations, at thy feet"! It is no longer required that the 'Glory to God' be intoned (begun) by the celebrant.

The Opening Prayer

As the concluding and culminating part to all that has gone before in the introductory rites, it is inevitable that this should be chanted by the celebrant, the now-united congregation adding its resounding assent with a chanted "Amen" (instead of the normal

muttered mumble).

We have fully prepared ourselves in the introductory rites to participate in the liturgy: we can now sit with alert minds to hear the Word of God proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word.

In the mid-1970s in NZ (and England and elsewhere) Liturgists agonised over the Introductory Rites: "over emphasising one part at the expense of another"; "putting too much emphasis on a relatively minor part of the liturgy"; "a sung Gloria lengthens the introductory rites disproportionately" etc. At the time, and more so now, I feel that this reasoning missed the boat.

The introductory rites have an internal dynamic, from the initial sign of the cross to the opening prayer, which takes us from our individual concerns and pre-occupations, moulds us into a unity with a purpose, fixes our sights on "the other" and prepares and draws us inevitably to God's Word and his saving act of Redemption.

Perhaps only in this full, free and wholehearted response of song will this vision be made apparent.

RITE OF SPRINKLING WITH HOLY WATER

O Lord, You will Sprinkle Me. (Asperges Me)

(English Transliteration,
adaptation and harmonization:
Michael F. McConnell.)

Cantors: O Lord, you will sprinkle me *All: Lord, you will sprinkle me with hys-

sop and in my life your love will grow. It is you who will wash me, Lord,

and your precious blood cleansing me shall make me whiter than the moun-tain snow. (fin)

Cantors: Give glory to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spi-rit.

All: As it was in the begin-ning, is now and ever shall be,

world with-out end. A-men, A-men. All Repeat Antiphon.

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PENITENTIAL RITE

Michael F. McConnell

Priest: Lord Jesus, your covenant brings life and salvation
Cantor: Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.
Assembly: Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.

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

Priest: Lord Jesus, your victory over sin is our salvation:
Cantor: Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.
Assembly: Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.

Priest: May Almighty God * forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
have mercy on us, A-men

(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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