

Do *This* In Memory of Me

The *General Instruction of The Roman Missal* places great importance on singing in the liturgy, but perhaps not in the way that most people would understand the role that signing has in the Mass.

The greatest importance is attached to those parts of the Mass that are usually to be sung by the priest, the priest with the people responding, and then to those parts where the priest and people sing together. The parts that can be sung by ministers or the people really should not be neglected on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (*GIRM no.40*). For all practical purposes what is being referred to are, for example; the prayers sung by the priest after which the people respond by singing *Amen*, the Preface dialogue during which the priest sings and the people respond before the priest sings the Preface itself, and to this could be added the responsorial Psalm, the Alleluia, the Lamb of God, etcetera. The guiding principle in choosing which parts of the Mass ought to be sung, especially by ministers or by the people, has to do with the ability of the people themselves. Some congregations can only do that which is more simple, while others may be able to do much more, such as the case of a cathedral church.

What may surprise many people when it comes to music in the liturgy is that, in the words of the *GIRM* itself, *the main place should be given, all things being equal, to Gregorian chant, as being proper to the Roman Liturgy (no. 41)*. The *main place* in most people's common experience is not given to the chant that is historically a part of the Mass, but rather something more contemporary and newer which has replaced it. The majority of Catholics, it can be argued, have never experienced a celebration of the Mass that is truly *Roman*.

Giving the *main place* to Gregorian chant in the liturgy by no means suggests that modern compositions should never be developed or put to use in the celebration of the Mass; however, great prudence is to be exercised before one considers modern music as an option. In their document *Sing To The Lord: Music In Divine Worship*, the bishops of the United States presented criteria by which music ought to be judged before it can be used at Mass, and cautioned against music that was *cheap...trite, or the musical cliché often found in secular popular songs which cheapen the liturgy...expose it to ridicule...and invite(s) failure (no. 135)*. Much can be said about music that *cheapens* the celebration of the Mass, but this is a catechesis on the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, and so we will return to that.

Section Three of the *GIRM* addresses itself to the individual parts of the Mass and the first individual part is the one that is also the most obvious; the Entrance.

At the Entrance, the priest, when the people have gathered, together with the Deacon and the other ministers, enter the church. It is at this time that the Entrance Chant begins. The purpose of the Entrance Chant, among other things, is to *introduce their (the people's) thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and to accompany the procession of the priest and ministers (GIRM no. 47)*. The chant is to be sung *alternately by the choir and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone (GIRM no. 48)*. In the United States there are four options for the Entrance Chant, and they are (*GIRM no. 48*):

- a) The antiphon from the Missal, or the antiphon with its Psalm from the *Roman Gradual*¹.
- b) The antiphon from the Missal with a Psalm from the *Simple Gradual*.
- c) A chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons.
- d) Another liturgical chant that is suited to the Mass and has been approved for liturgical use.

The first thing that one may notice is that no mention is made of an entrance hymn, even though singing a hymn at the beginning of Mass has been the most common experience of most Catholics for the past 50 years. Strictly

¹ The *Roman Gradual* and the *Simple Gradual* are liturgical books used by the Church that contain all of the proper texts of the Mass that are generally sung.

speaking, the singing of hymns is more proper to the Liturgy of the Hours (the Divine Office) than anything else. This is the original and historical use of the hymn (*STL no. 115, d.*). However, once again, this does not mean that the use of hymns is forbidden during the celebration of the Mass. The hymns that are to be recommended before all others are those which are found in the *Roman Missal* and the *Roman Gradual*. Vernacular hymns may be used during the Mass as well, but they must pass scrutiny with regards to whether or not they fulfill the role that liturgical music ought to fulfill. (*STL no. 115, d.*)

Having said that, when it comes to the Entrance, Offertory and Communion Chants, the U.S. Bishops reiterate what the *General Instruction* already makes very clear, namely, *proper antiphons from the liturgical books are to be esteemed and used especially because they are the very voice of God speaking to us in the Scriptures (STL no. 116).*

For those who attend daily Mass, and perhaps make use of a personal missal, are familiar with the proper texts of each Mass. Each Mass has its own Antiphons, Prayers, and Readings which have been carefully prepared in order to present to the faithful some aspect of the unfathomable depths of the riches that are to be found in Christ. Considering how each Mass has been prepared by the Church as means of drawing the faithful more deeply into the mystery of Christ, and therefore the mystery of their redemption, it is easy to understand why these texts should rarely, if ever, be replaced. The reason why Propers are called *proper* is because they belong to the very Mass that is being celebrated that day. At the end of the day, the most significant difference that one ought to experience between a daily and a Sunday Mass is that during a Sunday Mass, the texts of the Mass, including the Antiphons, are sung rather than recited.