

SoundBytes for 13-14 January 2018

Behind the Scenes

Why do I continue to talk about the G.I.R.M. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal) and what it asks for?

I continue because many Catholics do not realize that:

1. The texts for every procession within the Mass (Entrance, Offertory, Communion) have been pre-determined
2. Those pre-determined texts consist of antiphons and their psalms

Read what the G.I.R.M. itself says:

48. ... In the Dioceses of the United States of America, there are four options for the Entrance Chant, Offertory Chant, and Communion Chant:

- (1) the antiphon from the Missal or the antiphon with its Psalm from the *Graduale Romanum*, as set to music there or in another setting;
- (2) the antiphon and Psalm of the *Graduale Simplex* for the liturgical time;
- (3) a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms;
- (4) another liturgical chant that is suited to the sacred action, the day, or the time of year, similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.

Only Option 4 allows us to sing texts that are not antiphons and psalms. As such, they are not pre-determined by specific text, but by sacred action, the day, or the time of year. 'Chant' refers to Gregorian chant, simple chant, or other music underlying a text.

Where, then, do I look for guidance when deciding hymn and song texts?

What is the focus of Mass?

Which texts best assist with this focus?

The initial 'source file' to which I have looked is the *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* (the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*), one of the constitutions of Vatican II.

Another resource I've used is Archbishop Sample's *Rejoice in the Lord Always*, a Pastoral Letter on Sacred Music in Divine Worship, written for the diocese of Marquette in 2013. Sample first establishes the reason we have music in the Mass, then reiterates the Constitution's article #112:

*The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn Liturgy.*¹ (emphasis added)

Sample continues (all bold and underlined excerpts are my own emphasis):

"This understanding would preclude the common notion that we take the Mass and simply "tack on" four songs (the opening hymn, offertory hymn, communion hymn and recessional hymn), along with the sung ordinary of the Mass (Gloria, Sanctus, etc...). We must come to see that, since sacred music is integral to the Mass, the **role of sacred music is to help us sing and pray the texts of the Mass itself**, not just ornament it."

Later in that same letter he states:

(1.f.1) “The liturgical books (the Missal, Graduale and Lectionary) envision that, as a rule, we **sing the Mass at Mass, rather than sing songs during Mass**. To truly sing the Mass as described below is the ideal and should be an overall priority for parish worship.”

Aha! ‘The texts of the Mass itself’. The texts that have been prescribed. The antiphons with their psalms, the top three preferences from the G.I.R.M.

Regarding hymns, Sample teaches:

(1.g.1) “... **It is important to recognize that when we sing hymns at these moments during Mass, it is because we are omitting some of the Mass chants: the Propers as discussed above.**

And,

(2.e.1): “Because they substitute for the sacred texts of the Propers, hymns and songs must be genuinely sacred music. **Texts must be theocentric - centered on God, not on ourselves or the congregation. It is desirable that a hymn reflect the Proper text whose position it occupies, or the Scripture readings of the day. At the very least it should have some reference to the season or the feast.** Its length should also be taken into account considering the moment of the Mass it will occupy so that it does not require to be cut short to fit the ritual action or extend excessively beyond the same action...

(2.e.3) **Hymn and song texts must conform to the teachings and doctrines of the Church, especially with regard to the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.** Any which promote teachings contrary to the Faith are not to be used and must be retired from the parish repertoire. **It must be sadly acknowledged that some hymns in approved hymnals, music issues and missalettes do not reflect Catholic theology and should not be used. Musicians should be attentive to this point and think carefully about the selection of hymns, seeking guidance from the pastors of the Church when needed.**

So: when I choose hymns in accordance with G.I.R.M. category 4, my top three priority questions are:

1. Does the text reiterate that day’s Scriptures, or at least, align with the liturgical season?
2. Does the text focus on praise for, address to, or continually refer to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Trinity?
3. Does the text show strength by containing non-compromising imagery, clarity of thought, or a story line?

To find texts relevant for each Mass, I use 3 Catholic online resources, and 4 physical resources. Between all 7 resources, I read commentary on the lessons, sift through hymn and anthem options, and read many a hymn text to see which best fit the three priorities above.

When we had the worship aids, I also sought different styles: Gather-Hymnal for the Saturday 5:30p Mass; traditional for 8a and 10:30a Masses; contemporary for the 5:00p Masses.

This will be the topic on which I focus next week.

References:

1. *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy (the Sacrosanctum Concilium)*
2. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*
3. Bishop Sample’s *Rejoice in the Lord Always*, a Pastoral Letter on Sacred Music in Divine Worship

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