What role does music play in your faith?

Music has played a very important role in the expression of our faith from the earliest days of the Church. The first Christians inherited from the Hebrew Bible the melodic Psalms that were used to worship God in song. In the New Testament, St. Paul’s letters exhort the Christian communities “be filled with the Spirit as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and, “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Eph 5: 19-20 & Col 3:16). The Church gives direction to ensure that music worthily praises God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “song and music are closely connected with the liturgical action. The criteria for their proper use are the beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly, and the sacred character of the celebration” (CCC n. 1191). It is noteworthy that some of the most beautiful music in Western culture was composed as sacred music for church liturgies or had religious themes by such famous Catholic composers as Paolo Agostino, Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, J.S. Bach, Antonín Dvořák, Joseph Haydn, Antonio Vivaldi and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, to name just a few. The Roman Catholic Church even invented its own unique musical system – Gregorian Chant – which continues to enjoy pride of place in Church liturgies and which is undergoing a revival. We can see that music plays an important role in the Catholic Tradition; a famous adage advises “to sing is to pray twice.”

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