

Confessions of a First-Year Choir Member

by Bill Cote

As the long, hot, tragic summer mercifully draws to a close, I find myself more than ready to start my second year in the 11am Adult Choir. It's been three months since I've had the pleasure of singing with the choir, and I didn't realize how much I'd miss getting together on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings with the group. There's nothing better than singing to reenergize your spirit -- and I sure could use that after all the bad news flooding the airwaves in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

I joined the choir during the Time and Talent weekend last year at Holy Family and it turned out to be the best decision I've made in quite awhile. It required more time and talent than I thought it would, but it's been well worth it. In addition to meeting some great people, I've deepened my faith and become a much better singer. If you love to sing, and you're up for a challenge, please join us!

I sing and play guitar in a band with my brothers, but I hadn't sung in a choir since I was in the third grade. So when I walked into the first practice, I was clueless - I didn't know the difference between a tenor and an alto. (As it turns out, there's a big difference!) Our choir director, Robert Todd, took one look at me and put me in the bass section.

Robert is an incredibly gifted musician. But what most of us in the church probably don't know is what a riot the guy is - he'd crack us all up more than a few times every practice. But when it comes to music, he's dead serious about making the choir sound the best it can. And he doesn't shy away from tackling difficult pieces of music.

So before I knew it, I was inundated by a flood of very challenging choral music. Not at all the cakewalk I was imagining! This wasn't your garden-variety church music -- these were huge, dramatic pieces of music that were complex and gorgeous. Certainly worthy of what we were ultimately trying to do -- worship God.

Luckily, Robert cut me plenty of slack, letting me know on more than one occasion that the first year, I got "a free ride". Of course, I wasn't the only one holding down the bass section. I had two other voices to help

guide me through the music. In fact, the Holy Family Choir is made up of some tremendously talented folks.

I'm sure most of the prayers I uttered during mass last year were asking for the same thing - "Please don't let me mess up this next song!" I do believe divine intervention saved quite a few performances.

In fact, mass takes on a whole new intensity when you're sitting in the choir loft. They say that when you sing, you pray twice; but on a few occasions, I bet my prayers got multiplied three or four times over. Between the adrenaline of nerves and the huge sound of the organ behind you, and all the deep breathing, and the concentration -- not to mention the hot choir robe -- well, it just made every mass a cathartic experience for me.

Singing during the big religious holidays of Christmas and Easter elevated the experience to a whole new level. Performing the traditional *Lessons and Carols* made last Christmas one of the most memorable I've had. Luckily, Robert brought in a ringer to help hold the bass section together for that performance. With Dr. Vernon Taranto, the choral director of St. Petersburg College, singing right next to me, it made it a whole lot easier to find the right notes!

And I couldn't help but get a little holier during the Holy Week and Easter. Singing through the marathon 2-hour Holy Thursday Mass (complete with washing of feet), the solemn Good Friday liturgy, the beautiful candle-lit Saturday vigil and the triumphant Sunday Mass (with horns blaring) turned Holy Week into something truly uplifting.

To top the choir season off, the Holy Family Choir was selected to sing with two other local choirs at the dedication of St. Raphael's beautiful new church in Snell Isle. The sunset dedication service was led by Bishop Lynch, and when the lights went on in the church for the first time, it was an incredible experience to be singing with so many other voices.

A few days later, I found out that one of our choir members' sons had been seriously injured in an auto accident that same evening. It seemed incomprehensible that something this tragic could happen to someone as sweet and devout as this person. But it's during dark moments like these that being a part of a tight-knit group like our choir is even more important for the support it provides.

So as I dust off my choir binders and leaf through my music in preparation for my sophomore year, I'm anxious to get started, and also a little bit nervous. After all, the free ride is over... but I know the journey is just getting started.