



Music at Mass

The Importance of Singing

The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col 3:16). Great importance should be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass. Every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. (GIRM #39, 40)

Pastoral musicians should consider how best to encourage the full, conscious, and active participation of the whole assembly. All musical choices are made in line with the three-fold Liturgical, Musical, and Pastoral judgement set forth in the United States Bishops' document *Music In Catholic Worship*. (MCW #26-41)

Introductory Rites

The Entrance Song

After the people have gathered, the opening song begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. The opening song is sung even if there is no procession to the altar. The four-fold purpose of this song is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, lead their thoughts to the mystery of the season or feast, and accompany the entrance procession. It is sung by the cantor/choir and people, entirely by the people, or by the choir alone. The nature of the song as expressing and fostering the unity of the assembled Body of Christ suggests that this last option would be used rarely. (GIRM #47, 48)

The Act of Penitence

The Kyrie Eleison ("Lord have mercy") is a litany that may be sung, especially in penitential seasons. The Kyrie Eleison functions as a separate ritual element when the Confiteor ("I confess...") is used, or as a response to the tropes in praise of Christ in the other forms. On occasion, especially on the Sundays of the Easter Season, in place of the customary Act of Penitence, the blessing and sprinkling of water to recall Baptism may take place. (GIRM #51, 52)

The Gloria

The Gloria is an ancient hymn of praise. It is sung or said on Sundays outside of Advent and Lent, on solemnities and feasts, and at celebrations of a more solemn character. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other. The opening words of the Gloria are intoned

by the priest or, if appropriate, by a cantor or by the choir. The body of the hymn is sung either by everyone together, or by the people alternately with the choir/cantor, or by the choir alone. (GIRM #53)

Liturgy of the Word

The Responsorial Psalm

The Responsorial Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance because it fosters meditation on the word of God. It is preferable that the Responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. The psalmist sings the verses from the ambo or another suitable place. The text of the Responsorial Psalm should be taken from the Lectionary selection of the day. A seasonal psalm, (see #173, 174 in the Lectionary for Mass for the common psalms) or another psalm approved by the Conference of Bishops or the diocesan bishop may also be used. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm. If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God. (GIRM #61) The GIRM makes no mention of the choir having any role in the psalm. Like other portions of Scripture that are proclaimed, a high value is placed on communicating the text as intelligibly as possible—by an individual psalmist rather than by a group of singers.

The Gospel Acclamation

All stand for the Gospel Acclamation. The Alleluia (or another acclamation during Lent), led by the cantor or choir, is sung by all. The verse, however, is sung either by the cantor or the choir. (GIRM #62) When there is only one reading before the Gospel, as at weekday Masses, the alleluia or acclamation may be sung after the psalm, or may be used as the psalm response. If not sung it may be omitted. (GIRM #63)

The Creed

If the Creed is sung, the people should participate in the singing. (GIRM #68)

The Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is both a response to the word of God and an exercise of the baptismal priesthood of the faithful. The priest directs the prayer from his chair. The intentions are announced from the ambo or from some other suitable place, by the deacon, a cantor, a lector, or one of the lay faithful. (GIRM #71) A period of silence

is observed after the announcement of each intention but before the invitation “we pray to the Lord...” On occasion the petitions may be sung. A sung response by the assembly can help to express the importance of the intercessions as the priestly ministry of the whole community.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Preparation of the Gifts

The procession and placement of gifts is accompanied by a song which continues until at least the gifts have been placed on the altar. It is not always necessary or desirable to sing at this time, organ or instrumental music is also an option. When song is used any appropriate song of praise or of rejoicing in keeping with the season is the best choice. The norms on the manner of singing are the same as for the entrance song. It may be sung even when there is no procession with the gifts. (GIRM #74 MCW #71)

Music During the Eucharistic Prayer and Other Presidential Prayers

The text of the Eucharistic Prayer is recommended to be sung by the priest, however, if it is not sung, there should be no instrumental music during the recitation of this or other presidential prayers. (GIRM #32)

The Eucharistic Acclamations

The Holy, Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen are sung or said by all the people. These acclamations ought to be sung even at Masses in which little else is sung. (GIRM #79, 151, MCW #54)

The Lord’s Prayer

If the Lord’s Prayer is sung, it should be sung by all the people. (GIRM #38, 81)

The Lamb of God

The Lamb of God litany is usually sung by a cantor or choir with the assembly responding. This litany accompanies the Fraction Rite and may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite is concluded. Tropes may be added to the litany so that the prayerfulness of the rite may be enriched. The last time ends with grant us peace.” If the Lamb of God is not sung it is recited. (GIRM #83, Liturgical Music Today #20)

The Communion Song

The Communion Song begins while the priest is receiving Communion. The purpose of the Communion song is to express the communicants’ union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the communitarian nature of the procession to receive communion. (GIRM #86, 159)

The Communion song is sung either by the cantor/choir with the people or by the choir alone. Although the

GIRM allows the song to be sung by the choir alone, the active participation of the whole assembly is more in keeping with its function “to express the communicants’ union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices.” (GIRM #86, 87)

The options for choosing the Entrance Song, song at the Preparation of Gifts and the Communion song are the same. The text may be an antiphon and psalm drawn from the Roman Gradual, the Simple Gradual, or another approved collection. Instead of an antiphon and psalm, some other suitable liturgical song may be chosen. (GIRM #87)

The text chosen should be consistent with the nature of the Communion Song as expressing unity and joy of heart. In general, during the most important seasons of the Church Year, Easter, Lent, Christmas and Advent, it is preferable that most songs used at Communion be seasonal in nature. Songs expressing adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, while appropriate for worship of the Eucharist outside Mass, are generally not suitable during the distribution of Communion. (Music in Catholic Worship #62)

Optional Song of Praise after Communion

On occasion, the entire assembly may sing a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn after the period of silence and before the Prayer after Communion. (GIRM #88)

Concluding Rite

The Recessional Song

After the blessing, the deacon or priest dismisses the people “so that each may go out to do good works, praising and blessing God.” (GIRM #90)

Even though the GIRM does not explicitly mention singing at the end of Mass, because the text describes the community leaving “praising and blessing God,” it has been customary in most parishes to sing a closing song. When music is used for the dismissal it should express joyful praise of God as members of the assembly go out to take up the mission of Christ in the world.

Use of Latin

Since faithful from different countries come together more frequently, it is fitting that they know how to sing together at least some of the parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin. (GIRM #41)

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, *Music In Catholic Worship* and *Liturgical Music Today* together set the norms for liturgical music in the dioceses of the United States of America.