



Praying the Mass Anew

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

7. To Sing at Mass or to Sing *the* Mass?

“**T**he one who loves, sings.” This quote from St. Augustine both invites our reflection and hopefully captures our own experiences of how music and singing has the power to uplift us, such as in experiences of songs “in our head” in times of peace or joy. These connections of music, joy, and love from daily life (whether we sing well or think that we “can’t carry a tune in a bucket!”) apply also to our invitation to encounter God more fully in the liturgy of the Church in song.

Throughout the life of the Church, singing has been given great attention and status as a way to more properly worship God. An ancient expression (which at times has also been attributed to St. Augustine, though we do not know for sure) is that “one who sings well prays twice,” expressing how prayer is doubly effective when it is sung. As far back as the 5th century we have written musical scores of prayers (primarily the Psalms) that would have been used in monasteries to pray and give praise to God. These settings, which serve as part of the Church’s patrimony that would later become more properly called “chant,” show that singing and worship truly go hand in hand. Music in the liturgy of ancient times was never

thought of as something “extra” or added on to prayer. Singing is at the very core of how the Church ought to pray.

The new translation of the *Roman Missal* will necessarily require that new settings for liturgical music be produced. Familiar acclamations or hymns, such as the “Memorial Acclamation” (the verse that we sing after the words “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith”) and the “Glory to God,” have significantly new structure and wording in places. In addition, there are clearer directives that these words should not be changed in any way, which will therefore require entirely new music settings (we will speak more fully of these directives in later articles on these particular parts of the Mass).

Given the changes in the words, and thus, the need for new music settings, it is once more emphasized that music is not something added on to prayer – but it is the way we “ought” to pray. In the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, while it is granted that not every word must be sung at every Mass, it is stressed that on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation there should be at least some singing during Mass, with particular preference given to “those [parts] that are of greater importance and especially to those to be sung by the

priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the priest and people together.” In particular, this passage refers to the singing of parts such as the prayers themselves, and the greetings and responses that take place throughout the Mass. Accordingly, the Church holds her own patrimony of chant, and the chant called “Gregorian Chant” as having “pride of place,” for it is by way of chant that these particular prayers, greetings, and responses can be sung without the need to change their wording to fit a fixed music melody or tempo. The music and pattern of chant takes its shape instead according to the words themselves – and thus the text itself never has to be altered.

Given this emphasis of singing parts of the Mass itself, truly the Church is inviting us to “sing the Mass,” and not merely sing at Mass, as though music and singing is an extra. Hopefully, as we begin using the new translation, all will be open to learning new music, unto learning to sing the Mass itself. For when we sing the Mass, we are opening ourselves to deeper encounter with the Lord, to whom the Psalms exhort us to sing a new song. Our hearts can be made ready for a deeper joy, causing greater love in the hearts of we who sing, that our prayer may be doubly affective.

Questions of the Week:

➤ ***Why does “Gregorian Chant” have “pride of place” in Church music?***

As mentioned in the main article, chant is at the very heart of the Church’s own musical history, as chant came to be from the Church for the Church, so to speak. Chant has developed throughout the centuries from more primitive types of “plainchant” (which has a very small range of notes) to the more embellished chants of later centuries. The term “Gregorian Chant” refers to Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.), who organized and gathered a collection of chants as used in Rome. The words of these chants are drawn primarily from the Bible itself. Though not all chant is properly called “Gregorian,” that it is Gregorian Chant which is given pride of place is a reflection of the connection to the Church in Rome and that typically the texts of Gregorian Chant are composed using biblical texts.

➤ ***Why doesn’t every parish have the same books for music?***

In so many words, the Church in the U.S. has not limited the publication of resources for liturgy to one publisher. Multiple publishing agencies exist with permission to produce books with hymns, prayer settings, and other resources for use at Mass. While some of the hymns and settings are usually found in every hymnal or missalette, each company has been given the freedom to produce and publish music while maintaining ownership to the rights of such hymns – and hence, they have the ability to produce a unique collection of music. Accordingly, each parish has the opportunity to choose from several approved options.

At this time, a challenging reality is that while some pieces are found in almost all, if not every hymnal, the versions of the words may not always be the same. It is expected in the future that a unified set of hymns and music settings will be published by all publishers as an “American repertoire,” while still allowing the publishers the freedom to produce their own unique works.