THE PRIEST CELEBRANT—
ENCOURAGED TO SING

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The latest news from the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (www.ICELweb.org/news.htm) provides helpful information on the development of chant music by a group of musicians working together with the translators of the new Roman Missal. The background includes an extensive description of the rationale of the development of the chants. This information will be especially helpful for priests familiar with musical notation not only to prepare to sing the new chants of the revised Missal but also to learn more about the role of chant in the Liturgy today.

The purpose of this article is to invite priest celebrants to reflect on the role of music in the Liturgy in light of how much they actively sing the chants of the Mass at present and to encourage priests to take steps to increase their use of singing in the Liturgy.

As musicians and clergy begin to make preparations for the implementation of the revised translation of the Roman Missal, they may discover increased emphasis on the place of chant (singing) in the presidential prayers and other texts of the priest celebrant. This emphasis must be seen against the backdrop of the integral relationship between music and Liturgy. Even as the place of music in the Liturgy is often accepted as important and central, pastoral musicians often note the challenge of societal influences which might discourage active participation (singing) in favor of listening to someone else sing as though at a performance. Some feel that only professionals should sing, that singing at Mass requires a trained voice. Rather, authentic worship requires that we use our gifts and engage our whole selves in giving praise to God.

The current practice regarding singing for priests is quite diverse across the country. Music education and training in seminary formation varies widely from seminary to seminary. At a minimum, it seems that musicians are brought into the seminary on a part-time basis to teach seminarians the chants of the Liturgy. It is encouraging to note that many recently ordained priests mention that they were trained to be able to sing at least one setting of the Eucharistic Prayer. Some priests, however, were never trained in music or were discouraged from singing. Others have simply, over time, just convinced themselves that they cannot sing even though the truth is otherwise.

This time of preparation before receiving the new text of the Roman Missal provides an opportunity to encourage our priests to sing the various chants of the Liturgy. Music ministers can support priests by
giving them time and training if a particular priest is interested. Perhaps priests might take the time to work with the music minister in their parish to learn parts of the Mass that they have not previously sung, especially as recent liturgical texts have emphasized new priorities.

**WHY SHOULD PRIESTS SING?**

The ICEL introduction to the chants for the new *Roman Missal* notes a number of reasons why the priest celebrant should sing:

1. To preserve the tradition of unaccompanied singing which gives the Liturgy a more noble form;
2. To continue the realization of a goal given by the Second Vatican Council in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of “full and active participation” of all the people;
3. To reinforce, by chanting, the accentuation of the English language; and
4. To preserve the vernacular chants already in use.

The USCCB’s 2007 guidelines on music in the Liturgy, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, explicitly address the role of the priest in singing the Liturgy in paragraphs 18–21. These paragraphs highlight the importance of the priest singing the presidential prayers and the dialogues of the Liturgy according to his ability. As previously stated, the implementation of the revised *Roman Missal* is an opportunity for priests to expand their own abilities and to learn to sing the revised texts of the parts of the Mass.

Even if the priest himself is not confident singing alone, he should definitely pay attention to his singing with the rest of the community in congregational song. If the celebrant is not perceived as interested in the communal singing of the Liturgy, it will almost always influence the way in which the community will respond in song. Here the truism can apply: “Lead by example.” In addition, the priest, by his attention and participation, should support the role of the cantor and psalmist. The priest also needs to be careful in the use of the microphone when singing with the gathered assembly in order to avoid having his voice overpower that of the people.

Finally, in preparation for the reception of the *Missal*, pastors can point out to the faithful the overall importance of music in the Liturgy as well as the various parts of the Mass that should be sung and who should sing them.

**WHAT SHOULD PRIESTS SING?**

*Sing to the Lord* encourages the priest, particularly on Sundays and solemnities, to sing the Sign of the Cross and the dialogues. Priests will be able to utilize chants provided for these parts in the revised *Missal*. However, some priests who have been hesitant to sing at all may want...
to start by trying to sing these elements on a single pitch. From there, with the help of a music minister, they may progress to using the new chant settings. Singing these parts of the Mass gives emphasis to the dialogical nature of the Liturgy. God has initiated the dialogue, and the Church responds through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. In addition, such dialogical singing emphasizes the interaction of the ministerial (ordained) priesthood and the royal (baptismal) priesthood of the faithful. Number 95 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) notes that God has made His own a holy people “so that they may give thanks to God and offer the spotless Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him . . .” In addition, number 34 of the GIRM states: “Since the celebration of Mass by its nature has a ‘communitarian’ character, both the dialogues between the priest and the faithful gathered together and the acclamations are of great significance; in fact, they are not simply outward signs of communal celebration but foster and bring about communion between priest and people.” We are mindful that the priest, in order to preserve this dialogic structure, should not sing along with the congregation in their responses to the dialogues.

Of course, there are some priests who will have no difficulty at all in singing the parts of the Mass that will be made available to them in the revised *Missal. Sing to the Lord* does note in number 20 that, at a minimum, priests should sing those parts of the Eucharistic Prayer for which notation is provided. Particularly on Sundays and solemnities, the opening dialogue and the Preface, the invitation to the Mystery of Faith (the Memorial Acclamation), and the concluding doxology should be sung.

The importance of the priest singing the various parts of the Liturgy must also be explained to the faithful. Recently, for example, the Secretariat of Divine Worship received a telephone call from a parishioner who was very concerned that the young priest in her parish chanted the Eucharistic Prayer and asked: “Is this Catholic?” “Catholic” it is, indeed, but it is still a new experience for many of the faithful.

As an illustration for studying other texts of the *Order of Mass*, we provide a detailed examination of the concluding doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, by which the Church expresses glorification of God. The text presented here has already appeared in the revised translation of the *Order of Mass, now confirmed* by the Holy See’s *recognitio*. The text is identical in all of the Eucharistic Prayers to ensure the affirmation and acclamation by the people. A theological analysis of the text is followed by a detailed explanation of the arrangement of the chant notation.

Everything belongs to the Father. All honor and glory ascends to the Father. This happens through a great Christocentric movement captured by the propositions: “Through,” “with,” and “in.” Finally, we recall that this ascent to the Father happens “in the unity of the Holy Spirit.”

We look now at the more specific musical concerns that ICEL offers in its Introduction:
Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer

Through him, and with him, and in him, to you, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, is all honor and glory, for ever and ever. R. Amen.

The opening phrase treats the English text exactly as in the revised Preface tone. This is preferable to retaining AC and CB note groups on “through” and “with,” which would result in unattractive repeated notes:

Through him, and with him, and in him,

Note that the revised setting stays on the reciting note C rather than cadencing on “almighty Father,” as might have been suggested by the current setting. The reason lies in the syntax of the revised text, which calls for a repetition of the first musical cadence on “Holy Spirit” rather than on “almighty Father.” It is felicitous that the full concluding cadence of the revised Preface tone . . . is able to be used for “honor and glory.”

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Through our celebration of the Liturgy since the Second Vatican Council, we have come to the realization that music is indeed an ordinary part of the Church’s liturgical life. We know, however, that its use must be governed by the principle of progressive solemnity. There is a great distance between the extremes: (1) liturgy at which nothing at all is sung, and (2) those situations in which everything that demands singing is, in fact, sung.

Since the Second Vatican Council, even the nature of weekday Mass has shifted. Various melodies for the acclamations have become part of the Catholic consciousness and need only to be introduced by one person for all to join in singing a cappella. Attempts are presently being made by some composers to see if even simple refrains might be able to be used for the psalm response at weekday Mass.

The priest must exercise good pastoral judgment in choosing what should be sung at a particular liturgical celebration. Elaborate singing at 6:30 AM weekday Mass in Ordinary Time does not manifest the sense of balance one wishes to achieve. While leading the people to a deeper appreciation of the use of music in the liturgy, the priest must have the wisdom to know when he is simply forcing his own approach upon the people rather than helping them to come to a new level of expressing
the richness in the texts.

In his 2006 Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI notes that liturgical song has “pre-eminent place” as an aspect or building block of the *ars celebrandi*, the art of liturgical celebration (see no. 42). Singing not only *at* the Liturgy but singing *of* the Liturgy (i.e., singing the rites themselves), which involves both the priest and the gathered assembly, is an important tool for fostering the full, conscious, and active—and therefore fruitful—participation in the Liturgy. The implementation of the revised *Roman Missal* provides an opportunity for pastors and parishes to evaluate their practices and commit to embracing the *ars celebrandi*, which will lead to more fruitful worship and prayer.

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**SAINT DAMIEN OF MOLOKA’I AND MUSIC**

Saint Damien de Veuster, recently canonized as Damien of Moloka’i, used the Church’s rich musical heritage in his ministry to the people in the leper colony at Kalaupapa. The church he constructed—Saint Philomena—was a brightly painted, joyful, and spirited place. Father Damien filled the services there with grand processions, elaborate ceremony, and music. Serving as a member of the choir came to be a great honor for patients who were chosen to sing the liturgy.

One of the most elaborate events of the year was the celebration of Corpus Christi. Preparations took weeks, flowers were sown into leis, and when Father Damien carried the Blessed Sacrament through the village, children spread petals before him, while the parishioners joined in hymns.

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**GOING ONLINE**

NPM values the opportunity to provide continuing service, information, and support to its clergy members. Almost all dioceses and religious orders in the United States and in many other nations now communicate with their members by using e-mail and online materials, and NPM would like to take advantage of that connection to provide an even richer form of this quarterly newsletter. You’ll notice, for example, that this issue is five pages long—something that would not be possible in print.

We have e-mail addresses for about two-thirds of our clergy members, and we will use those addresses, as we have done with this issue of *Clergy Update*, to alert you to upcoming issues of this newsletter and other materials for the clergy available on the Clergy Section page of NPM’s website: [http://www.npm.org/Sections/Clergy/index.html](http://www.npm.org/Sections/Clergy/index.html).

If you have not yet given us an e-mail contact, please do so by sending an e-mail message to clergyupdate@npm.org. In the body of the message, please include your name, zip code, and member number (found directly above your name on NPM mailing labels). Or phone: (240) 247-3000, ext. 19.