

# Singing Songs of Expectation



of the Church's year. With repeated singing, the words lodge in our souls and gradually shape our beliefs and our Christian identity. These are the songs that we learn "by heart" and sing even without looking at the hymnal. They are the ones that become a reservoir of faith to draw on in dry times.

The songs we sing affect the way we gather together as Christians and the way we pray, think, and live. They give us words and images that nourish and sustain us and offer us a vision of what the Church can be, if we live the Gospel faithfully. They sing of hope in the future that God works to create for this world.

Many people have found specific hymns and liturgical songs that touch and express—through the combination of words and music—the deepest sources of their faith and hope and love. Such compositions range from the ancient songs of the tradition to newly composed songs that "sound like us" and our culture.

**T**he Church was born singing hymns—and the texts of some of those early hymns are found in the New Testament. When history ends, we will go into the reign of God singing "a hymn to the Lord's glory with the whole company of heaven" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 8). Built on the strong foundation of the apostolic hymns, and with the song of the angels and saints echoing in our souls and drawing us forward, we sing hymns and liturgical songs as part of worship. The best song texts for us to use find their inspiration in the Scriptures, but the music for those songs is shaped by the many cultures in which we live, by the heritage of hymnody that we share, and by the way these hymns and songs are used in the liturgy.

The hymns and songs we use in worship should be beautiful in both words and music. We need hymns that are humanly attractive, songs of poetic beauty that *show* us—rather than merely *tell* us about—a God who is Beauty as well as Goodness and Truth.

## The Faith We Sing

A well-written and carefully chosen hymn or song will shape our Christian spirituality and our way of living out the Gospel. It shapes our relationship to God and to each other as the Body of Christ. We sing to God but also about God and about what it means to be Church. We pray, and offer praise, and proclaim our faith through our singing.

A wholesome song of faith becomes more and more meaningful as we sing it repeatedly through the rhythm

## Into the Future

Our hymns and songs don't merely root us in the past or shape us in the present; they lead us forward. They put the taste of God's vision in our mouths, on our lips, preparing us to sing the new song of praise to God and to the Lamb (Revelation 5:9–14). They remind us that we are "wayfarers," as Saint Augustine called us. In one of his sermons, Saint Augustine spoke about how we should sing. He said: "You should sing as wayfarers do—sing, but continue your journey. Do not be lazy, but sing to make your journey more enjoyable. . . . Keep on making progress. . . . If you make progress, you will be continuing your journey, but be sure that your progress is in virtue, true faith, and right living. Sing then, but keep going."<sup>1</sup> Walk, roll using a wheelchair, run with the enthusiasm of children, process solemnly with the great body of the saints; stroll, dance, hike. In whatever way you move, sing and press onward to the high calling of the people of God.

## Note

1. From Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 256," English translation from the *Liturgy of the Hours* © 1970, 1973, 1975, 1976, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. All rights reserved.