

Sing to the Lord: An Examination of Conscience for Clergy

My first call to religious life was as a Jesuit novice. In teaching us how to make the daily *examen*, our novice master told us that St. Ignatius asked his companions to reflect on the positive before moving to the negative. They were to ask first: “Where did I see or reveal the presence of Jesus today?” Only then were they to ask: “Where did I miss seeing Jesus or an opportunity to reveal Jesus today?” Or: “Where did I reveal what was not Jesus today?” I still find this method helpful.

Recently, our bishops gave us *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL), a revision of the 1972 document *Music in Catholic Worship*, “to guide and oversee liturgical song in each particular church . . . [and] . . . draw all who worship the Lord into the fullness of liturgical, musical prayer” (Foreword). The April-May 2008 issue of *Pastoral Music* is devoted to general articles about this document, but I believe that a reflective, critical, and careful reading of this text offers a kind of *examination of conscience* (an *examen*) for us who are clergy—specifically the sections on bishops, presbyters, and deacons, numbers 16–23.

The Bishop. STL states that “the diocesan bishop is particularly concerned with the promotion of the dignity of liturgical celebrations, ‘the beauty of the sacred place, of music, and of art’” (STL, 16, quoting GIRM, 22). How is the bishop to accomplish these goals? “Through the example of his own celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, encouraging sung participation by his own example; by his attention to the practice of liturgical music in the parishes and communities of his diocese, especially in his own cathedral church; by his promotion of the continuing musical education and formation of clergy and musicians; and by his careful attention to the musical training of future priests and deacons” (STL, 16). Staffs of diocesan offices of worship and/or members of the diocesan music and liturgical commissions provide “valuable assistance in promoting sacred music together with pastoral liturgical action in the diocese” (*Musicam Sacram* [MS], 68, quoted in STL, 17).

The Priest. When talking about the ordained priest, STL states that “no other single factor affects the Liturgy as much as the attitude, style, and bearing of the priest celebrating” (STL, 18). If this observation were not strong enough, it adds that “the importance of the priest’s participation in the Liturgy, especially by singing, cannot be overemphasized . . . [H]e encourages sung participation in the Liturgy by his own example, joining in the congregational song. ‘If,

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“Where did I reveal what was not Jesus today?”

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however . . . the priest . . . does not possess a voice suitable for the proper execution of singing, he can render without singing one or more of the more difficult parts which concern him, reciting them in a loud and distinct voice. However, this must not be done merely for the convenience of the priest or minister” (MS, 8, quoted in STL, 19).

The Deacon. Similarly, STL states that “after the priest, the deacon is first among the liturgical ministers, and he should provide an example by actively participating in the song of the gathered assembly” (STL, 22). Therefore, as they are able, “deacons should be prepared to sing those parts of the Liturgy that belong to them” (STL, 23). This means that deacons need “training in singing the dialogues between deacon and people, such as those at the Gospel and at the dismissal” (STL, 23). The training that deacons receive should also pay attention to the *Exsultet*, the tropes in form three of the act of penitence, the prayer of the faithful, and the chanting of the Gospel.

An Examination of Conscience

These quotes emphasize the importance of personal and ministerial example. The way in which we participate in the liturgy can either help or hinder the participation of all the baptized. Training in music and liturgy contributes greatly to our ability to participate with confidence and comfort. Musical and liturgical formation of future clergy and laity will make the difference between whether or not the assembly’s full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy is helped or hindered. Finally, then, it’s not about us. Collaboration with worship staff on the diocesan and parish levels is valuable in “promoting sacred music together with pastoral liturgical action” (STL, 17). These key elements and paragraphs 16–23 are the basis for the questions I offer in this examination of conscience.

- Do I actively participate in the song of the gathered assembly (22)?
- Do I pick up a hymnal or worship aid to enable that participation (16, 19, 22)?
- Do I sing the presidential prayers and dialogues of the liturgy according to my capabilities (19)?
- What do my attitude, style, and bearing convey to the rest of the liturgical assembly when I preside (18)?
- Am I willing to have my musical capabilities stretched, or do I let myself off the hook due to fear or inconvenience (19)?
- Do I sing the dialogues between the ordained and other people, sensitive to their dialogic nature, so that I don’t sing the people’s response with them (21)?
- Do I sing the parts of the Eucharistic Prayer and other chants like the *Exsultet*, for which musical notation is provided in the missal, when appropriate (20, 23)?

- If my voice is not “suitable for the proper execution of the singing,” do I recite in a loud and distinct voice (19)?
- Do I chant the Gospel on more solemn occasions (20, 23)?
- Am I attentive to the cantor and psalmist as they lead the assembly (21)?
- Because singing is a corporate act, do I turn off or step back from the microphone when my role is to sing with the assembly (21)?
- Do I put resources into the musical training of clergy, seminarians, liturgists, and musicians (16, 20, 23)?
- Have I asked that programs of priestly and diaconal formation offer compulsory courses in chant and the song of the liturgy (16, 20, 23)?
- As a bishop, do I have an office of worship and/or liturgical and music commissions (17)?
- Do I collaborate with the liturgical music staff or commissions to promote full, active, and conscious participation (16)?

Do As I Do, or Do As I Say?

Actions do speak louder than words. The psalms remind us that witness is strongest when deeds match words. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* takes these phrases to heart, emphasizing the example of the ordained in sung participation during the celebration of the liturgy. *Sing to the Lord* takes these phrases to heart, asking us to put our resources of time, effort, and money where our mouths are and to provide for the musical formation of all members of the liturgical assembly, especially those responsible for leadership: bishop, presbyter, deacon, and liturgical musician.

I know that our plates are full and our time feels too stretched, even on our “easier” days. However, one of our primary ministries is to lead the assembly in the celebration of the liturgy. I hope that a periodic examination of conscience based on the consciousness raised in STL will help us sing the liturgy more fully and be a source of mutual support for all our assemblies.

This examination, prepared by Rev. Paul Colloton, OP, was originally published in Clergy Update, a quarterly newsletter for clergy members of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians. © 2008 National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

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