

Balance in the Life of a Pastoral Liturgical Musician

By Marie Rubis Bauer

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I have always been taken with the text of the hymn:

*Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
(Francis Ridley Havergal, 1874)*

If one looks literally at this hymn, it appears to reflect a total submission of the self unto God. I think the words have much to tell us as we struggle each day to achieve balance in our lives.

*Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

Our very existence is a gift of God. Every moment of every day should be cherished and lived to the fullest. As we open scripture, the first two things that we learn from the Genesis accounts of creation are that God always existed, and that God created. What an amazing model for artists and musicians...to know that through our recreating we follow in the image of God our Creator.

Time is precious; an important resource that nonetheless has very real limits. On the seventh day God rested. We must take this as an important cue. Rest and worship are not just a luxury; they are built into the plan. While we as musicians often work hardest on the Lord's Day, we must still carve out time in our lives to observe a day of rest and recuperation, "...the Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath."

*Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.*

The obvious interpretation of this verse has to do with service. Could it also refer to us being served by Christ, as well? The impulse of the love of Christ is manifest in the Eucharist and in acts of charity. Throughout history, countless individuals have also called upon Christ for healing. We recall the healing of the man with the withered hand or of the lame man who was able to walk at the command of Christ. In so doing we are reminded that we come to Christ as we are - weak and wounded, bruised and sore. In order to serve, we must step back to recognize our own failings and our need for healing. Indeed, Christ serves us in our weaknesses.

We certainly must value the gifts and talents entrusted to us, but we must also understand and accept the reality of our limits. Time is a very real limit in the life of a minister. We must faithfully take time to recuperate, to reflect, and to be healed so that we might serve better. Pray often.

*Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use every power as Thou shalt choose.*

The issues of employment and compensation of the liturgical musician are many and varied. Some liturgical musicians are happily employed and compensated. Many musicians volunteer their services as a labor of love. Many are overworked and underpaid. The issue of justice in compensation and workload is a very real issue in ministry. While we earn our living as stewards of this great creation, we are charged to return a portion to God. Parishes often provide formulas where one can figure an exact amount which is due to God. The reality is that

God is worthy of all that we can give. In addition to monetary contributions, I have found, over the years, that volunteering in an area outside of music is deeply rewarding.

As far as the intellect, we certainly use our intellect in every liturgical and musical venture. The development of the intellect takes time and effort. It is a valuable part of our offering to the church and should not be overlooked as we weigh the issue of how to spend our time and resources.

*Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own it shall be Thy royal throne.*

Many of us over work ourselves on a regular basis, yet have we stopped to consider God's will for our lives. Find a confessor, spiritual director, or close friend with whom you can share your thoughts, concerns and joys. This person should be completely honest with you, and function as a mirror, so that you might gain other perspectives regarding your life and the impact it is having on others, so that you might know yourself better. The head and the heart may battle with one another - but in the end you will come out ahead. In each person the balance between head and heart may be slightly different, but it takes both for wise decision-making. If things are difficult in your position, if it becomes necessary to make a change in your professional situation, it is often helpful to have a confidant to help you to think clearly.

*Take my love, my Lord; I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever only, all for Thee.*

When you are feeling out of balance, remember why you wanted to become a Liturgical Musician in the first place. Was it the manner in which love was expressed in melodies too deep for words? Or was it the way that the words entwined in the ribbons of chant became woven into your very soul? Perhaps it was the way you discovered that you could make a difference in the prayer life of another parishioner through the vessel of your voice? We each have a different story. But I would be willing to wager that love is at the root of it all. Christ's love for us, our love for Christ and for each other, and the love of God's Beauty itself. Our lives are a sacrifice of love for God and for the Body of Christ.

We will probably spend our whole lives in search of the perfect balance between work and rest, the intellect and the heart, serving and being served. We know that our healing and our wholeness comes through the one source of perfect balance, the incarnate Christ - fully human, and fully divine. Whether it be in rest or work, may we find ourselves centered in Christ, balanced as pastoral liturgical musicians.