

Priest, Liturgy, Song: Making Connections

Q What is the priest's role in sung worship?

A As a baptized member of the assembly, the priest sings when the rite calls for it. As the ordained celebrant, a priest has his own texts that should or may be sung, depending on the occasion and the nature of the gathering. Some of those texts include especially the dialogues between the priest and the rest of the assembly and those parts that the priest sings with everyone, which are integral to sung liturgy, but also the three major prayers that collect the unspoken prayers of the community (opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, prayer after Communion) and the preface and other parts of the Eucharistic Prayer that have a musical setting. Finally, the priest directs and coordinates all the ministries at the liturgy, so he works with those “who have some role in the celebration” to choose the texts, music, and other options that will best meet “the needs, spiritual preparation, and culture of those taking part” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 352).

Q How does a pastor work with the director of music ministries to plan sung worship?

A They each bring special responsibilities and gifts to the service of the liturgy. The pastor is particularly charged to be a “servant” of the liturgy, making sure that this community’s worship is celebrated in accord with the worldwide Roman Catholic Church in a way that will respond to the “common spiritual good of the people of God” gathered here (*General Instruction*, 24, 352). The director of music ministries — indeed, any pastoral musician — has the responsibility, first, to guarantee that the assembly and its ministers have the resources that they need to sing the liturgy in appropriate ways (*General Instruction*, 40) and, second, to see that the music ministers are sufficiently skilled and prepared to perform their ministry (*General Instruction*, 102, 103). To this shared responsibility, each brings personal gifts, training, and a pastoral sensitivity to the nature of Catholic worship and the needs and abilities of this particular community.

The pastor and the director of music ministries develop a working relationship that aims to bring this community to the goal of all worship: “conscious, active, and full participation . . . in body and mind” in Christ’s perfect self-offering, “a participation burning with faith, hope,



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and charity, of the sort which is desired by the Church and demanded by the very nature of the celebration and to which the Christian people have a right and duty by reason of their baptism” (*General Instruction*, 18).

Q Why should the priest pay so much attention to music in the liturgy?

A First, his responsibility for the liturgy requires it, since music is an integral part of Roman Catholic worship. Second, priests don’t merely want the rites to be celebrated, they want them to be celebrated *well*, and good music united to the liturgical texts is an important aspect of good celebration. Good liturgy transforms the lives of believers, and people seek out liturgy that is well done, with solid preaching, good music, and clear connections to living the Gospel from day to day. Third, music, even more than the other arts, has a lasting influence on the way people receive and live the faith. To sing is to engage the whole person — body, mind, and spirit. To sing a text makes that text more memorable, and so music serves catechesis and mystagogy — part of the priest’s preaching ministry.

If Catholics are to be the leaven in society that we are called to be, then we need good and memorable music as a key component of our liturgy, so that we may sing heartfelt praise to God and go forth, as one of the solemn blessings at Mass prays, walking in God’s ways, always knowing what is right and good, until we enter our heavenly inheritance.