

Bishops' Responsibility: Good Liturgy

Dedicated bishops have it tough these days. They struggle to overcome the terrible stain on the Church of clergy sexual abuse and support necessary accountability, and they work to make life safe for children and for anyone who might be abused. They are executives of underfunded institutions that suffer from the slow national recovery and from declining support by ordinary parishioners as well as by corporate donors. They have to mediate between the needs and expectations of an international Church and the expectations of a secularized western culture. They are targets for anyone who has a gripe against a particular parish, pastor, school, teacher, or other institution or representative of the local church or the worldwide Church.

And in the middle of all this, bishops are required to be both the exemplars of good liturgy as well as the persons responsible for overseeing the liturgical practice of the diocese in a way that promotes quality celebrations of the Church's ritual practice. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) describes a bishop as the "prime steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care" as well as the "moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole liturgical life" (GIRM, 22). This means that Mass with the bishop presiding, especially those celebrations that gather or represent the whole diocese, "must be exemplary for the entire diocese." And it means that the bishop is responsible for promoting liturgical formation of priests, deacons, and the "lay Christian faithful," overseeing the "dignity of these celebrations," and making sure that "the beauty of the sacred place, of the music, and of art should contribute as greatly as possible" to dignified and genuine celebration (GIRM, 22).

As these responsibilities apply to music, the bishops of the United States remind themselves in *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL) that a bishop "carries out this duty 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).

Fifty years ago, the bishops gathered at Vatican II, looking ahead to what would be expected of them and of those following them as leaders of dioceses, so far as the liturgy was concerned, had the wisdom to know that they would need help to promote liturgical life and liturgical renewal. And so they demanded that each diocese have "a commission on the sacred liturgy under the direction of the bishop, for promoting the liturgical apostolate" as well "as far as possible, . . . commissions for sacred music and sacred art" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 44).

Those commissions and related offices of worship, under the guidance of their local bishops, have found various ways to promote liturgical life and the music of divine worship. Some focus on training or formation for various liturgical ministers, offering or encouraging courses for lay ministers at a local seminary or college. Some focus on example, making sure that the celebrations at the cathedral church model liturgical ideals and by promoting rich and full celebrations of the liturgy whenever the bishop travels to a parish or diocesan institution. Some focus on distance learning and make available electronic resources through a diocesan website. Some rely on associations like NPM to provide resources that smaller (and some larger) dioceses cannot offer, encouraging parish memberships and participation in annual conventions and other programs.

However they tackle the task they are expected to do, bishops and those who work with them are expected to dedicate themselves to the ideal that has driven the liturgical renewal throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. That ideal is expressed in two key sentences, articulated together at the Second Vatican Council and repeated in nearly every liturgical document since then. Worship is always about "sanctification of [people] in Christ and the glorification of God" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC], 10), and the way to enter into that dual goal is "full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations, which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (SC, 14).