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Dear Members:

By the time you receive this issue of *Pastoral Music*, we will be deep in the midst of celebrations that fill these days of Easter joy and spring beauty—confirmations, first Communions, weddings, ordinations, graduations, and other important events. Musicians, clergy, and other pastoral ministers can find themselves a bit overwhelmed during this busy season, but if we take the time to pause and reflect on the events of these days, we can rejoice in celebrating growth and renewal in our communities.

As the Easter Season will soon give way to Ordinary Time, so also will most of us experience the welcome transition to a less demanding summer schedule. The summer months offer many of us a space to focus on our own personal, spiritual, ministerial, and professional renewal. Those who enjoy fewer demands in the summer have the opportunity to make a retreat, take a vacation, spend time with family and friends, attend a convention or institute (more on that later), read books and articles, or take a class.

The focus of this month’s *Pastoral Music* reminded me of one of my own personal renewal goals—to immerse myself in the psalms. Last January I had the privilege of gathering with about 100 other musicians and clergy to reflect on the psalms under the leadership of Robert Batastini and Abbot Gregory Polan, osb. As we read, sang, and reflected on the texts of *The Revised Grail Psalms*, I became aware of how important the psalms are, not only for liturgical music ministry but even more for our life of faith.

In his apostolic exhortation following the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (2010), Pope Benedict XVI wrote that in the psalms “God gives us words to speak to him, to place our lives before him, and thus to make life itself a path to God. In the psalms we find expressed every possible human feeling set masterfully in the sight of God; joy and pain, distress and hope, fear and trepidation: here all find expression” (no. 24).

This issue of *Pastoral Music* addresses the personal, ecclesial, and liturgical dimensions of the psalms in the life of the Church and its members today. For these biblical songs to have an ever deeper impact, we need to pray them, sing them, study them, and allow them to transform our living. Would you like to join me in exploring the psalms this summer? Here are some practical suggestions:

- Spend some extra time preparing the responsorial psalm for Sunday Mass. In addition to the necessary musical preparation, slowly and thoughtfully pray the entire psalm at least three times during the week before it is to be sung, using the refrain only at the beginning and end.
- Pray at least a portion of the liturgy of the hours every day, perhaps morning and/or evening prayer. If the official liturgy of the hours seems too daunting, you may find adapted forms in a number of publications, including *Give Us This Day* and *Magnificat*. Take extra time with the psalms and pray them slowly, allowing your imagination to take an active part in your prayer.
- Read a book or some articles on the psalms. This issue of *Pastoral Music* is a good start, but you might also try *Sing a New Song: The Responsorial Psalm in the Sunday Lectionary* by Irene Nowell, osb.
- Read and pray one new psalm each day. Don’t just read it; let your mind, your emotions, and your imagination take an active role in praying the psalm.
- Since we are, after all, musicians, explore two or three different musical settings for the responsorial psalm each Sunday, even if you’ve already decided which ones to use at Mass. Keep a psalm journal and write down your reflections about how different musical settings bring out different ways of hearing and praying the text.

Whether or not you choose to spend this summer with the psalms, I do hope that you will take advantage of this time for renewal and refreshment. Have you registered yet for the NPM Convention in Pittsburgh (July 23–27)? There’s nothing quite like five days learning, praying, singing, and celebrating to lift one’s spirits in preparation for another year of service. I hope to see you there!

J. Michael McMahon  
President
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The Association President and the NPM Board members also serve on the NPM Council without a vote.
Liturgical musicians in the United States lost an inspiring mentor, tireless advocate, and trusted friend when Father Larry Heiman, C.PP.S., died on the morning of February 26.

Born in 1917 in Decatur, Indiana, Lawrence Heiman entered the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in 1932 and was ordained to the presbyterate in 1943. Shortly thereafter he was assigned to the faculty of Saint Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Indiana. A musician who came from a musical family, Father Heiman was a man of many talents and interests. He studied theater at The Catholic University of America and spent the early years of his priesthood teaching math and theater in Rensselaer. In the 1950s he was sent to study Gregorian chant at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome, to which he returned in the late 1960s to complete and defend his doctoral dissertation.

Father Heiman is best known as the founder of the Rensselaer Program of Church Music and Liturgy, which for more than fifty years has been providing summer study in liturgy and liturgical music at Saint Joseph’s College (SJC). He served as director of this program for thirty-five years. “That was my life,” he noted in an interview just months before his death.

Composer and cantor James Hansen, a graduate of the program, summarizes the recollections of many alumni: “My own personal remembrances will always be his chironomic fingers peeling back layers of mystery and an expression of compelling attention whenever he spoke to another person.” Sister Mary Jane Wagner, S.S.F., who taught at SJC in the mid-1990s and who currently serves as professor of organ and church music, notes: “Father Larry’s legacy is profound. His dedication to the Church and especially to the tradition of great church music—the chant in particular—was matched by his passion to connect this tradition to our contemporary reality. He bridged worlds and labored ceaselessly, without counting the cost.”

While fostering the success of the Rensselaer Program, Father Heiman also supported educational efforts in liturgical music around the country. A founding member of NPM, he served for many years as editor of the “Calendar” column for Pastoral Music, and he remained throughout his life one of the NPM’s biggest supporters.

Though a committed teacher and meticulous scholar of chant, Father Heiman embraced the Vatican II liturgical reforms and promoted early efforts to develop liturgical music in English. In the mid-1960s, summer faculty members at Saint Joseph’s College undertook the task of assembling a collection of English propers for the Mass, using adapted Gregorian melodies for the antiphons and chanted verses grounded in Anglo-Catholic chant. For eight summers in the 1970s, Father Heiman hosted summer workshops in African American liturgical music sponsored by the National Office for Black Catholics. Rawn Harbor, who participated in those gatherings, writes: “Never had we seen a person with such energy, verve, and understanding as he. . . . For so many Black Catholics, Father Heiman represented the best of the Catholic Church and Catholic academic institutions . . . . He was a wonderful soul.”

Father Larry Heiman retired to St. Charles Center in Carthagena, Ohio, in 2007, after serving on the SJC faculty for sixty-three years. He died in the age of ninety-four, just one year short of his seventieth anniversary of ordination. Near the end of his funeral homily, student and colleague Ralph Verdi, C.PP.S., commented: “While I do not dare to presume to usurp the Lord’s prerogative in judging individual souls, I must tell you that I do not find it hard to imagine that when Father Larry stands before the Lord, he will hear those magnificent words which Jesus spoke in Matthew’s Gospel: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Come, share your master’s joy.’”

Those gathered in Carthagena for the funeral sang “In Paradisum” as, under sunny skies, Father Heiman’s body was laid to rest.

Steven Janco

Dr. Steven Janco is the current director of the Rensselaer Program in Church Music and Liturgy.
Editorial

New Rubrics, Renewed Focus?

By Gordon E. Truitt

Several pastoral musicians commented during Lent about the set of rubrics, new to this edition of the Roman Missal (at least in its English version), that governs all the services of the Paschal Triduum. These new directives are, in fact, stunning, encouraging a dramatic shift toward a richly pastoral understanding of the liturgies of the Triduum. In effect, the rubrics say: Do things properly—“properly” understood here in an exciting and fully Vatican II sense. Here are the rubrics:

1. In the Sacred Triduum, the Church solemnly celebrates the greatest mysteries of our redemption, keeping by means of special celebrations the memorial of her Lord, crucified, buried, and risen…

2. For a fitting celebration of the Sacred Triduum, a sufficient number of lay ministers is required, who must be carefully instructed as to what they are to do.

The singing of the people, the ministers, and the Priest Celebrant has a special importance in the celebrations of these days, for when texts are sung, they have their proper impact.

Pastors should, therefore, not fail to explain to the Christian faithful, as best they can, the meaning and order of the celebrations and to prepare them for active and fruitful participation.

3. The celebrations of the Sacred Triduum are to be carried out in cathedral and parochial churches and only in those churches in which they can be performed with dignity, that is, with a good attendance of the faithful, an appropriate number of ministers, and the means to sing at least some of the parts.

Consequently, it is desirable that small communities, associations, and special groups of various kinds join together in these churches to carry out the sacred celebrations in a more noble manner.

Don’t just perform these services, celebrate them in all their richness. Make them engaging, and help people to become engaged by appropriate preparation. And if your community is unable to do that because of limited resources, find a community that has the resources! (Certainly, this directive is not intended to disparage the best efforts of small urban or rural parishes, but it does point out the value of sharing resources, when possible, to enrich the celebration of the Triduum for everyone.)

Like other changes in the rituals of the Triduum, however, these rubrics will probably serve as a dividing line between those who embrace Catholic ritual in its richness and congregational participation in its fullness and those who do not. Think about the development in understanding what it means to celebrate these rites that has taken place over the course of a century or more of the liturgical movement and how each change was greeted either with enthusiasm or with relative indifference.

Before Pope Pius XII’s reform of the Holy Week liturgies in the mid-1950s, these services were sometimes done with little more than grim-faced determination to observe the rubrics. (I can just recall that the Paschal Vigil was celebrated on Holy Saturday morning, beginning at about 9:00 AM, with the parish priests, the nuns from the convent, a few choir members, and the assigned altar boys present—and few other people. I was one of those assigned altar boys.)

The reformed Holy Week rites, celebrated on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, were much more engaging, and they were welcomed by many priests, pastoral musicians, and newly engaged parishioners. Still, there were places where these rites were presented unenthusiastically, where the real effort at offering engaging liturgy seemed to be limited to the Masses of Easter Day that followed the Vigil.

When the rites were reformed once more after the council, a similar division focused on the options within the rites. Some parishes embraced the various options and offered pre-Triduum explanations of the rites and invitations to participate as fully as possible in the Church’s Paschal Triduum. In other parishes, however, only the minimal rites were observed, and then only with grudging acknowledgement of the rubrics that invited a richer celebration and fuller community participation.

Even with the direction encouraged by the rubrics in the Roman Missal, such a division in attitude is apt to continue, with those who embrace the Triduum likely to redouble their efforts to celebrate the rites in all their richness with a fully engaged community, and those who don’t understand why these nights are “different from all other nights” simply performing the rites without visible engagement in the mysteries being celebrated. But this significant set of rubrics offers us another chance to rethink not only how we celebrate the Triduum but also how we celebrate and invite engagement in all liturgy, especially in the Sunday celebration of the resurrection.

Several times, the Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar notes the connection between Sunday as the Lord’s Day and the Paschal Triduum. In its first paragraph, the document states: “Each week, on the day called the Lord’s Day, [Holy Church] commemorates the Resurrection of the Lord, which she also celebrates once a year in the great Paschal Solemnity, together with his blessed Passion” (Norms, 1, see also 4 and 18).

So, one might ask, if Sunday and the Paschal Solemnity are so linked, shouldn’t we take a look at how we celebrate Sunday in light of the guiding rubrics of the Triduum? It might make a significant difference if we did.

Dr. Gordon E. Truitt is the senior editor for publications of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.
Sing Out!

• Take the time this month to tell another pastoral musician, priest, deacon, or liturgist about what NPM means to you, and invite them to join your association.

• Ask to upgrade your membership to a regular parish membership, which will guarantee that both the pastor and the pastoral musician in your community will receive this magazine and all publications that go to our members. It also makes it possible for anyone in the parish to attend NPM events at the members’ rate. Discount!

• Invite someone to take a look at this issue of Pastoral Music or visit the NPM website: www.npm.org.

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For more information, visit us at: www.saintjoe.edu/academics/liturgy
Association News

Convention Update

Sunday Night SongFest

On the night before the convention, youth participants are invited to SongFest: A Night of Praise and Worship. In partnership with the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Spirit & Song (a division of OCP) will lead high school and college age youth in an evening of music and prayer. Join Steve Angrisano, Curtis Stephan, Jackie Francois, ValLimar Jansen, and more song leaders at Epiphany Catholic Church, 184 Washington Place, in Pittsburgh. Mass with Bishop Walterscheid, auxiliary bishop of Pittsburgh, is at 5:00 pm, followed by a pizza social at 6:00 and a praise and worship conference at 7:00. No registration required: Just show up prepared to sing and offer praise! For additional information, contact Gary Roney by phone—(412) 456-3140—or e-mail: groney@diopitt.org.

New Showcases

Two showcases have been added to the convention schedule since the brochure was printed, and one showcase presenter has canceled. There are two new presentations at Music Industry Showcase II (Wednesday, July 25, 10:45 am–12:00 noon).

S2–09 Hope Publishing Choral Reading Session. David L. Weck and Jane Holstein. Come and sing Hope’s newest choral music for two-part, SAB, and SATB choirs. A complimentary music packet will be provided.

S2–10 The Gospel Proclaimed: New Music from Concordia Publishing House. Jeff Honoré and David Johnson. Clearly proclaiming Christ is the task of all musicians. Come and hear how CPH music can season your liturgical song and ritual.

S2–05 Music to Sing the Liturgical Year (Terry Piontkowski and Lumen Christi Ministry) is canceled for Wednesday and for Monday morning (S1–04).

Cantor Institute

The Cantor Institute at the convention is an opportunity to take time exploring the rich ministry of cantor/psalmist for an extended time and with excellent leadership (Joanne Werner and Joe Simmons). Assess areas for growth, begin to fill in gaps, and lay the groundwork for a firmer foundation for your ministry. At the same time, participants will have an opportunity to earn the NPM Basic Cantor Certificate (BCC).

In addition to those participating in the week-long Cantor Institute, other cantors may complete requirements for the NPM Basic Cantor Certificate during the convention. A limited number of candidates will be accepted. Candidates are required to attend Breakout A-15 on Monday afternoon and complete the singing portion of the requirements on Wednesday, July 25 (time to be determined). Pre-registration for the BCC is required; no on-site registration. Application deadline: May 30.

Organ Master Class

This master class with Hector Olivera on Monday afternoon (July 23, 4:00–6:00
Hotline Online

Hotline is an online service provided by the NPM Membership Department. Listings include members seeking employment, churches seeking staff, and occasionally church music supplies or products for sale. We encourage institutions offering salaried positions to include the salary range in the ad and to indicate whether that range accords with NPM salary guidelines (http://www.npm.org/Sections/DMMD/salaryguidelines.htm). Other useful information: instruments in use (pipe or electronic organ, piano), size of choirs, and the names of music resources/hymnals in use at the parish.

A listing may be posted on the web page—www.npm.org—for a period of sixty days ($65 for members/$90 for non-members). Ads are limited to a maximum of 100 words.

Ads may be submitted by e-mail to npmmem@npm.org, faxed to (240) 247-3001, or mailed to: Hotline Ads, 962 Wayne Avenue, Suite 210, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4461.

Hotels Are Filling

By the time we go to press with this issue, as we pass 1,000 convention registrations, our fourth convention hotel—the Omni William Penn—will be nearly full. Our blocks of rooms in three other hotels—the Westin Convention Center, Hampton Inn and Suites, and Courtyard by Marriott—Pittsburgh Downtown—are still free. There is still room in our convention blocks at the Marriott Pittsburgh City Center (free wired and wireless internet access) and DoubleTree Hotel and Suites (in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh). Get your hotel reservations in now! (And don’t forget to send along your convention registration; go to www.npm.org for details and to register securely online.)

“We’re Gonna Need a Bigger Boat!”

There’s a lot of interest in the Gateway Clipper Riverboat Cruise on Tuesday evening (5:30–8:00 PM). As we sail the three rivers (Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio), the Clipper staff will provide a delicious three-course buffet dinner with all the trimmings. We’ve made sure that we have a large enough boat for all who want to participate in this relaxing and beautiful cruise. So be sure to register in advance if you want to experience this evening on the water and return in time for Evening Events IV and Taizé Prayer on Tuesday night.

2012 Institutes

Four This Summer

In addition to the institutes at the 2012 NPM Convention, the National Association of Pastoral Musicians is offering four summer institutes at sites around the country. Full information and registration forms for these institutes are


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TO REGISTER AND FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT www.choristersguild.org
available in this issue on pages forty-two through forty-four. Here’s a list of these outstanding educational opportunities.

Twenty-Sixth Annual Guitar and Ensemble Institute, June 25–29, Erlanger, Kentucky. The faculty for this five-day intensive program includes Bobby Fisher, Steve Petrunak, Jaime Cortez, Karen Kane, Jeff McLemore, Bonnie Faber, Ken Gilman, Stephen Lay, Brian Malone, and Rob Ellig. The site is the Marydale Retreat Center in Erlanger, just across the river from Cincinnati.

Twenty-Seventh Annual Choir Director Institute, June 25–29, Cleveland, Ohio. The faculty for this institute, which has something to offer everyone from the experienced, full-time director to the newly appointed one, includes Kathleen DeJardin, Rob Glover, David Philipart, and Rex Rund. The site is Notre Dame College in South Euclid (Cleveland), Ohio.

Cantor Express, Chicago, Illinois, June 29–July 1. The weekend has something to offer cantors at all levels: beginner, advanced, and professional. Loyola University is the site for this weekend program led by Joanne Werner and Joe Simmons.

Cantor Express, Dubuque, Iowa, August 3–5. Like the institute in Chicago, this institute offers you an opportunity to assess areas for growth, begin to fill in gaps, and lay the groundwork for a firmer foundation for your ministry. Mary Lynn Pleczkowski and Dan Girardot will lead this program at Mount Loretto, motherhouse of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Note: There are several options for housing at this institute; please read the housing information and registration form carefully.)

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Careful planning and good organization will help you accomplish your goals for the future. Planned gifts create opportunities both for NPM and for yourself through your estate and financial plans.

Planned gifts can yield benefits like these:
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• by naming NPM as a beneficiary in a retirement plan;
• by establishing a trust that benefits you as well as NPM;
• by making a donation of stocks, bonds, mutual funds, royalties, and other assets.

Determining what gift is right for you is just as important as making the gift. There is a myriad of options from which to choose, but the best plan will balance what you wish to accomplish for yourself, your family, and NPM in your overall estate and financial plans.

For further information on ways to support NPM through planned giving, contact: Dr. J. Michael McMahon, NPM National Office, 962 Wayne Avenue, Suite 210, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4461. Phone: (240) 247-3005; toll-free: 1 (855) 207-0293.

Program Scholarships for Conventions and Institutes

NPM program scholarships are made possible through the generosity of NPM members who have made financial contributions to the NPM Program Scholarship Fund. These scholarships are provided to assist pastoral musicians with limited financial resources in taking advantage of opportunities for continuing formation at NPM conventions and institutes.

Applicants for scholarships must be NPM members and should be from economically disadvantaged parishes. The financial need of the applicant should be reflected in the application. NPM encourages members of all ethnic and racial groups to apply for scholarships. Scholarship applications are considered on a case-by-case basis. Scholarships are awarded depending on the financial need of the applicant and the amount of funds available in the NPM Program Scholarship Fund. Scholarships for conventions include full convention registration only. Scholarships for NPM institutes include the commuter registration fee only. All remaining costs must be borne by the applicant and/or his or her parish.

More information and an application packet are available online at http://www.npm.org/EducationEvents/program_scholarship/scholarships.htm.

Members Update

Survey: Roman Missal Implementation

NPM is conducting a survey of members regarding implementation of the new Roman Missal and the new English translation of the Mass. We want to gather information on what kind of preparation was done for assemblies, priests, musicians, and other ministers; which types of catechetical resources were used; and which Mass settings are being sung. We are also trying to get some idea of how well the implementation has gone in parishes and other communities.

If you have not yet participated in the survey, please type the following link into your browser and share your experience: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NPMRomanMissal.

Continued on page twelve
Liturgical Music Institute

SEMINARY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
HUNTINGTON, NEW YORK
JUNE 24 - 29, 2012

The Liturgical Music Institute is a five day comprehensive program whose aim is to offer musical, liturgical and pastoral formation for both new and experienced liturgical musicians. Participants will take part in a ten hour liturgy course (The Liturgical Year for Pastoral Musicians) as well as applied music workshops in organ, piano, harp, voice, guitar and conducting and plenum sessions that will focus on specific pastoral dimensions of liturgical music ministry. Participants will also attend daily spiritual conferences, morning and evening prayer and daily Eucharist. In addition to the varied workshops and presentations, they will interact with other liturgical musicians from around the country to share ideas, concerns and best practices.

The Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, situated on 215 acres close to the Long Island Sound, will provide a unique and tranquil setting for the Institute. Liturgies will be held in the historic monastic chapel with its three manual E.M. Skinner organ. Classrooms and meeting rooms are equipped with state of the art technology to facilitate adult learning. Accommodations consist of single bedrooms with private bathrooms and showers. Air conditioned bedrooms are available on a first come, first serve basis. Costs include $420 for tuition, $150 for meals and $270 for accommodations (optional). One graduate credit is available for the Liturgical Year course for an additional fee.

For more information and for registration information, consult the seminary website.

Institute Faculty
• Sheila Browne, RSM
• David Close
• Christopher Ferraro
• Susan Hugelmeyer
• Lisa Kelly
• Dr. Jennifer Pascual, DMA

“Pastoral musicians should receive appropriate formation that is based on their baptismal call to discipleship; that grounds them in a love for and knowledge of Scripture, Catholic teaching, Liturgy, and music; and that equips them with the musical, liturgical and pastoral skills to serve the Church at prayer.” - Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship (#50).
Cantors on the Move

Members of the NPM Cantor Section are keeping very busy these days, getting ready for the convention and the two Cantor Express weekend institutes, helping people prepare for the NPM Basic Cantor Certificate and the Cantor Colleague Certificate, and keeping the Section’s page on the NPM website as well as its Facebook page up to date. Check out the latest at the CantorSection web page (http://www.npm.org/Sections/Cantor/index.htm) and on Facebook at National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) Cantors.

Will You?

In addition to their dedicated ministries, NPM members enrich the lives of other people through volunteer work for causes in which they believe. Many of our members also choose to include their charitable interests in their long-range financial plans. A carefully constructed will is one of the best ways to make charitable gifts while preserving economic security for oneself and loved ones. Bequests are made by people of all means, in all walks of life.

NPM offers a booklet that outlines a number of ways in which you might consider including a charitable gift to continue our work through your will, living trust, or other estate plans. For a copy of Giving Through Your Will, contact the National Office: NPM, Attn: Dr. J. Michael McMahon, 962 Wayne Avenue, available in this issue on pages forty-two through forty-four. Here’s a list of these outstanding educational opportunities.

Meetings and Reports

Conference of Roman Catholic Cathedral Musicians

The Conference of Roman Catholic Cathedral Musicians (CRCCM) held their Twenty-Ninth Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio, from January 9 to 12 this year. Each full day began with morning prayer at St. Joseph Cathedral. Major presenters included Matthew Peattie of the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music; he traced the origins and development of historical notational methods which helped propel what had begun as oral transmission. Organ builder Paul Fritts described his own organ building principles and experience and how they contributed to the design and development of the St. Joseph Cathedral organ. Kevin Vogt’s interactive session presented a model and structure for long-term prioritization for music ministers as well as suggested steps for achieving those goals.

Most Reverend Frederick F. Campbell, bishop of Columbus, Ohio, gave members a glimpse of worship through the eyes of a bishop. He spoke of the challenges of managing the liturgical life of an entire diocese while highlighting the essential role of the cathedral and its impact on the community. A “Liturgical Improvisation Workshop” was led by David Briggs, and Richard Sparks presented “Erik Ericson and the Swedish Choral Sound: What Can a North American Choir Learn from That Tradition?”

The time together also included a choral concert, a solo organ performance, solemn compline, a composers reading session, a tour of organs at several churches and at the Pontifical College Josephinum, and several business meetings, and it concluded with solemn Eucharist and the closing banquet.

CRCCM XXX—the Conference’s thirtieth anniversary conference—will take place in Rome, Italy, in 2013.

Chicago Series in Liturgical Music

In collaboration with the Chicago Office for Divine Worship, the Rensselaer Program of Church Music and Liturgy at Saint Joseph’s College, Rensselaer, Indiana, is launching a new educational initiative: the Chicago Series in Liturgical Music, a seven-credit sequence of courses, most of which will be offered part-time in the Chicago area over a period of eighteen months. With this new series, the Rensselaer Program will offer course work off-campus and during the regular academic year for the first time. All credits may later be applied to an MA degree program at Saint Joe’s.

The new series seeks to make the expertise of the Rensselaer Program accessible to those who cannot come to Rensselaer for four weeks during the summer, including part-time and volunteer musicians. The first course of the series is a three-day liturgical music intensive taught at Saint Joseph’s College, June 27–29. The first full-semester course begins in the Chicago area in September.

A generous grant from the ACTA Foundation will make it possible for the Rensselaer Program to provide some tuition assistance to those who need it. The grant will also help to fund two additional events that will be open to a wider range of liturgical musicians. For more information about the Series, contact Steve Janco, Director of the Rensselaer Program, at stevenj@saintjoe.edu; or Anna Belle O’Shea, Director of Liturgies and Music at the Chicago Office for Divine Worship, at aoshea@odw.org.
CONNECTING PEOPLE, SIMPLY.

Joan Hudson, Ministry Scheduler

WWW.MINISTRYSCHEDULERPRO.COM
Psalms in Catholic Worship

My Prayer as Incense

A billowing cloud of gas and dust rises in the Eagle Nebula. This incubator for new stars, is 9.5 light years (about 57 trillion miles) high.

NASA.
Why sing psalms? At the beginning and for a good part of our Christian lives, our hearts are wild places. Perhaps the following words of G. K. Chesterton describe your soul, your heart: “A man’s soul is as full of voices as a forest. . . . fantasies, follies, memories, madnesses, mysterious fears, and more mysterious hopes. All settlement and sane government of life consists in coming to the conclusion that some of those voices have authority and others not.”

Our hearts need the domestication described in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (NRSV). This passage is saying: Allow the Word to make a home in your heart. Say to God: “Make my heart over. If necessary, take me down to the studs. Put a new foundation under me. Remodel me. Add rooms. Turn me into a hotel.” In effect, think “Extreme Makeover.”

God’s toolbox for this makeover is the psalms! (“Psalms” refers not just to the 150 texts in the Book of Psalms but also to the seventy-five canticles of the Old and New Testament.) Song helps these tools get down into the heart; it also helps the heart express what it needs. A Minnesota youngster had kicked up a fuss at Mass, exasperating and embarrassing his mother. Arriving home she told him, “Time out, Mister. You sit in the corner until I tell you to come out.” Later, from the kitchen she heard faint singing. As she drew close to the source, her heart melted as she recognized her son’s song: “Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. Be with me, Lord, I pray.”

Clearly the boy’s heart had heard that Sunday’s psalm, and he was putting it to good use.

These ancient songs are not always pretty and polite. In fact three entire psalms (and parts of several others) are left for monks and nuns to sing because only they can handle the cursing of enemies in these psalms. All the “fancies, follies, memories, madnesses, mysterious fears, and more mysterious hopes” in our hearts need to come out of hiding. To paraphrase the Letter to the Hebrews 4:12–13: “Indeed, the word of God [in the psalms] is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no [fancy, folly, memory, madness, fear, or hope] is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.”

The very real C. S. Lewis advises his fictional friend Malcolm:

We must lay before God what is in us, not what ought to be in us. . . .

It may well be that the desire can be laid before God only as a sin to be repented; but one of the best ways of learning this is to lay it before God. . . . I have no doubt at all that if they are the subject of our thoughts they must be the subject of our prayers — whether in penitence or in petition or in a little of both: penitence for the excess, yet petition for the thing we desire.

Lewis’s insight is echoed by Ann and Barry Ulanov in their excellent study, Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer, in which they write: “Prayer is the place where we sort out our desires and where we are ourselves sorted out by the desires we choose to follow. . . . Prayer enlarges our desire until it receives God’s desire for us. In prayer, we grow big enough to house God’s desire in us which is the Holy Spirit.”

To understand the power of the psalm-singing, let us study the “default” Communion psalm, Psalm 34, the oldest psalm sung in Christian liturgy and the first that our ancestors memorized (see next page). Notice how many times and in how many ways the psalm says every/all, never/none.
Psalms: What Are They?

Psalms are poems, psalms are songs (“psalm” means “sung with the harp”), and psalms are prayers. Let’s begin with the psalms as prayers. The gold standard for prayer, private and corporate, is the 150 psalms and the seventy-five canticles of the Old and New Testaments. Think of them as the training wheels of prayer.

Our Jewish ancestors kept vigil with the bodies of their beloved dead by praying all the psalms, long before Christians borrowed the practice from them. One can imagine Jesus and Mary and their family and friends “psalming” dear, dead Saint Joseph through the night before his burial. But if Christians did not have the words by heart, they fell back on the perfect prayer, the Our Father, repeated 150 times (and this practice evolved into the rosary prayed before funerals).

Long before Christians blessed God and sought God’s help at break of day, at midday, and at day’s end, our Jewish ancestors did the same. What did they say or sing? Psalms.

Long before Christians took refuge in the words of the psalms, expressing anguish and outrage or thanks and praise, our Jewish ancestors did the same. (In fact 129 of the 150 psalms are used in the New Testament, a good number of them by Jesus himself.) One of these refuge prayers is the opening verse of Psalm 70, which became the opening verse of any celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, a.k.a. the divine office or the breviary: “O God, come to my assistance;/ O Lord, make haste to help me!”

Verse eighteen from Psalm 104 “explains” that these two lines are like a crack in the rocks, deep between which the common animal, the rock hyrax (about the shape and twice the size of guinea pig), wedges itself when threatened by predators: “For the goats the lofty mountains,/ for the rabbits [real name: rock hyraxes] the rocks are a refuge.”

Under siege from the temptation to tell someone off, to silence the alarm clock, to visit the refrigerator, to go shopping “to see what I want” (or whatever your favorite deadly sin is), our cry should be: “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me!”

And, all without noticing it, we have recited a line from a poem! “But it didn’t rhyme!” Not by sound, certainly, but it rhymes by synonym (or antonym, as the case may be). “Lofty mountains” “rhymes” with “rocks,” and “wild goats” with “rock hyraxes” (or “rabbits”). For that matter, “O God” “rhymes” with “O Lord,” and “come to my assistance” with “make haste to help me.”

Consider the poetry and the usefulness of Psalm 91, the psalm in time of temptation, the psalm of the first Sunday of Lent, sung since perhaps the fifth century at

Psalm 34 (33)

1 Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.
2 I will bless the Lord at all times; praise of him is always in my mouth.
3 In the Lord my soul shall make its boast; the humble shall hear and be glad.
4 Glorify the Lord with me; together let us praise his name.
5 I sought the Lord, and he answered me; from all my terrors he set me free.
6 Look toward him and be radiant; let your faces not never be abashed.
7 This lowly one called; the Lord heard, and rescued him from all his distress.
8 The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who fear him, to rescue them.
9 Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed the man who seeks refuge in him.
10 Fear the Lord, you his holy ones. They lack nothing, those who fear him.
11 The rich suffer want and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing.
12 Come, children, and hear me, that I may teach you the fear of the Lord.
13 Who is it that desires life and longs to see prosperous days?
14 Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.
15 Turn aside from evil and do good. Seek after peace, and pursue it.
16 The Lord turns his eyes to the just, and his ears are open to their cry.
17 The Lord turns his face against the wicked to destroy their remembrance from the earth.
18 When the just cry out, the Lord hears, and rescues them in all their distress.
19 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; those whose spirit is crushed he will save.
20 Many are the trials of the just man, but from them all the Lord will rescue him.
21 He will keep guard over all his bones; not one of his bones shall be broken.
22 Evil brings death to the wicked; those who hate the just man are doomed.
23 The Lord ransoms the souls of his servants. All who trust in him shall not be condemned. [None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.]
the introit (entrance), between the readings, before the Gospel, at the preparation, and at Communion!

Now, apply your renewed sense of how Hebrew poems work to this canticle of God’s patient love sung as the entrance song on Ash Wednesday since the eighth century:

Canticle of Wisdom (Wisdom 11:21–12:2, NRSV)

21 For it is always in your power to show great strength,

and who can withstand the might of your arm?

22 Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning dew that falls on the ground.

23 But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people’s sins, so that they may repent.

24 For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.

25 How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?

Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved?

26 You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.

1 For your immortal spirit is in all things.

2 Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass, and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin, so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord.

Sing a Psalm for the Entrance Procession?

The short answer to the question is another question: Why would you sing anything but a psalm for the entrance procession?

In the Church’s two official books for the songs to be sung at Mass, almost all the entrance songs are psalms. In the Roman Gradual there are 164 entrance songs, and 160 of them are psalms. In the Simple Gradual there are 63 entrance songs, and 56 of them are psalms.

Several psalms even tell us how we are to begin liturgy: with gratitude and reverence (Psalm 5:7; Psalm 100:4; Psalm 118:19), out of a sense of commitment (Psalm 66:13; Psalm 96:8), with joy and praise (Psalm 95:2), and with song (Psalm 100:2).

But to show how the psalms belong at this part of the Mass, we must first ask what the entrance song is supposed to accomplish. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (47) tells us: The purpose of the entrance chant “is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers.” It is the chief tool to get people in off the streets and ready to pray, so it isn’t over until the teenage boys are singing. (OK, that may be too much to expect, but you get the point.)

If Psalm 34 (O taste and see) has been the default Communion song since the fourth century, and Psalm 91 (Those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High) the default Lenten Season song since the fourth century, Psalm 118 has been the Easter Season psalm for almost as long as Christians have celebrated Easter. (In other words, a very long time!)

For an even longer time, our Jewish ancestors, including

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Jesus, sang this psalm as the last of the six Hallel Psalms (113–118, so called because they begin with the word “Hallelu Yah” — “Alleluia,” as we would sing it). These psalms were reserved for the joyous occasions of Tabernacles, Hanukkah, Passover, and Pentecost, so the good Jew prayed this psalm thirty-eight times a year. Scholars see the following shape in the psalm; and they detect in it the solo voice of a leader (David; Christ) and the ensemble voice of a group (the prophet Samuel and David’s father, mother, and brothers; the Church). The psalm divides into five sections: 1–4, call to thanksgiving; 5–18, description of divine rescue; 19–20, entrance into the Temple; 21–28, celebration of rescue; 29, closing call to thanksgiving (inclusion with verse 1). And here’s an example of the call-and-response structure between one voice and an ensemble:

Psalm 118 (117)

Praise the Lord [Hallelu Yah]
1 Give praise to the Lord, for he is good;
   his mercy endures forever.
2 Let the house of Israel say,
   “His mercy endures forever.”
3 Let the house of Aaron say,
   “His mercy endures forever.”
4 Let those who fear the Lord say,
   “His mercy endures forever.”

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The Responsorial Psalm: Different from All Other Psalms?

Psalm 119, the longest of all the psalms, is the second most popular of the responsorial psalms: it is used twenty-five times. Here are just a few of the twenty-six verses about the Word. This psalm teaches us that the best way of responding to God’s Word is with God’s Word.

9 How shall a youth remain pure on his way?
   By obeying your word.
11 I treasure your word in my heart,
   lest I sin against you.
16 I take delight in your statutes;
   I will not forget your word.
17 Deal bountifully with your servant,
   that I may live and keep your word.
25 My soul holds fast to the dust;
   revive me by your word.
28 My soul pines away with grief;
   by your word raise me up.

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Catholics of a certain age (I make no eye-contact, but you can tell them by their grey and/or thinning hair) got their first taste of psalm singing some forty years ago, with the reintroduction of the responsorial psalm at Mass. At that point, a “new” word entered our vocabulary: “antiphon.” And a “new” ministry was begun (revived, in fact): “psalmist.” And we got used to a “new” style of singing: The psalmist sang the antiphon, we repeated it; she sang a verse or two of the psalm, we repeated the antiphon; and so on.

Fine, and good: Responsorial psalms are responsorial in style. But why? What are they good for? They are good for responding to the inspired Word of God with the inspired Word of God. Responsorial psalms are responsorial by nature. The Liturgy of the Word at Mass (and indeed in every sacrament) is a conversation. God does not like to talk to himself. God is not interested in monologues but in dialogues. In the Word God calls to us; with that Word we respond. (Accept no substitutes!)

What God says to us can sometimes leave us scratching our heads or looking for cover; it often leaves us tongue-tied. But God doesn’t just occupy the speaker’s role; God also helps us listen and respond. The verses of the responsorial psalms and canticles help us hear. Their words help us untie our tongues and tell God what we would want to say if we knew what to say (or, to be more honest, what we would want to want to say).

It is helpful to think of the antiphon as God’s knock at the door of the heart. The Church so wants us to sing the responsorial psalm that she even provides a set of antiphons that ought to be sung even if the verses of the psalm have to be recited; these are listed first among the “Common Texts for Sung Responsorial Psalms” in the Lectionary for Mass. Even if singing just the antiphon is only the floor and not the ceiling of psalm singing at Mass, learning to welcome God’s knock by singing these
simple hellos is a humble way to begin letting God’s Word work at renovating our hearts. Of course, you can skip this technique and sing one or more of the entire common psalms for each season of the year (found in the same place in the lectionary).

Among the antiphons there is one that may be used almost year-round. Listed as an option for Easter Time, “Alleluia” (Hebrew for “Praise the Lord”) is such a completely adequate and even overflowing response to God’s Word that all during the Easter Season you may sing two or even three Alleluia instead of any other words. This practice extends to the entire liturgical year (except Lent, of course) in the form of “Alleluia psalms” (there are sixty-one of them) that can be sung as either Gospel acclamations or responsorial psalms or even psalms after the second reading (when there are two readings before the Gospel), before the Gospel acclamation.

Why, there are even three alleluia psalms for funerals (outside the Lenten season): Psalms 63, 114, and 130. Of course the music for these Alleluia psalms should not be happy-clappy. But what hope it demonstrates to sing Alleluia after every verse of Psalm 130 (Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord)!

The Communion Procession and the Psalms

Deciding what to sing at Communion is today the single most important choice a pastoral musician makes on a weekly basis. Until the late 1960s and early 1970s there were no Communion songs or hymns as such. Parishes that had implemented Pope Pius XII’s 1955 permission to sing hymns at low Mass often used benediction/adoration hymns. For my first communion (May 9, 1954), Sister taught us Faber’s “Jesus, My Lord, My God, My All” and “O Lord, I Am Not Worthy” (with its head-scratching—for boys anyway—reference to Christ as the “bridegroom of my soul”) by the prolific lyricist Anonymous. I was taught to offer private prayer when I returned to my seat (the longer those prayers, the more pious I would show myself to be). If organ music was played at that time, it would have been gentle, meditative music, out of the same kind of piety.

At the time of the early liturgical reform, few of us musicians paid enough attention to the production of the Simple Gradual (1968) and the revision of the Roman Gradual (1974)—the two official song books for Mass—not to mention the following passage from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (1970; the italicized sections in what follows are new to the 2002 edition of the Instruction):

86. While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant is begun. Its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the “communitarian” character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. The singing is prolonged for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful. However, if there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion Chant should be ended in a timely manner. Care should be taken that singers too can conveniently receive Communion.

87. In the Dioceses of the United States of America, there are four options for singing at Communion: (1) the antiphon from the Missal or the antiphon with its Psalm from the Graduale Romanum, as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the antiphon with Psalm from the Graduale Simplex of the liturgical time; (3) a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) some other suitable liturgical chant . . . .

If we had paid attention in those early years, we would have noticed the basic choreography of the Communion procession. The procession begins at or even before the priest receives Communion, and the processional song begins while the priest receives the sacrament.

If we had paid attention, we would have noticed that of the 163 Communion songs of the Graduale Romanum, only eight songs refer to the Body and Blood of Christ.

Deciding what to sing at Communion is today the single most important choice a pastoral musician makes on a weekly basis.

All of these songs were realigned as a consequence of our new lectionary so that, as the introduction to this Gradual says, “the new plan of biblical readings required transferring a number of texts (for example, Communion antiphons) to other days more closely connected with the readings.” Of the sixty-two Communion songs of the Simple Gradual, only four songs refer to the Body and Blood of Christ. And of the 618 Communion antiphons of the Roman Missal, only sixty-eight songs refer even indirectly to the Body and Blood of Christ.

Why this “infrequency”? Has the Church ceased to believe in the real presence? Hardly! Communion is about how Christ’s Body and Blood forgives our sins, restores us to community, and prepares us for life eternal, among many other things. (“O holy banquet, in which Christ is consumed, the memory of his passion is recalled, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us” [St. Thomas Aquinas, Canticle Antiphon for the Second Vespers of the Body and Blood of Christ].)

St. Ephrem of Edessa, deacon and doctor of the Church, suggests that the Word proclaimed at Mass is the Holy Spirit’s oven and cask. The Holy Spirit bakes the Eucharistic Bread of the Mass in the oven of the Word proclaimed at Mass. The Holy Spirit ferments the Eucharistic Wine of the Mass in the cask of the Word proclaimed at Mass. It
is thus not only the words of institution that change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Every word of the Word of God—pronounced by the Father and breathed by the Holy Spirit—effects this change. Every Eucharist is a new gift from the Trinity, never—to risk irreverence—the “same old thing.”

St. Augustine tells us that sacraments are visible words. In the case of the sacrament of the Eucharist, these words are not just visible but also tasteable, smellable, touchable, and hearable words.

So why does the General Instruction give priority to the Communion antiphons of the graduals? First, because they try to preserve the ancient tradition of singing words from the Gospel or the other readings as the Communion song and, second, because Communion is the fruit of the proclaimed Word.

In our Catholic tradition, slightly more than half (78) of the 150 psalms (or portions thereof) may be sung at Communion, and about thirty percent (22) of the seventy-five biblical canticles. Of these, the “usual suspects” are in the line-up: “Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge” (Psalm 16); “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23); “I will bless the Lord at all times” (Psalm 34); “God is our refuge and strength” (Psalm 46); “O God, you are my God, I seek you” (Psalm 16); “Happy are those whose way is blameless” (Psalm 119, thirty-seven portions). Of the canticles, Mary’s song of praise (Luke 1:46–55) is sung at least ten times, and the song of praise from Revelation (4:11, 5:9–12) is sung at least eleven times.

There is one “surprise” in the list of “default” Communion canticles: “You gave them bread of angels” (Wisdom 16:20–21, 26; 17:1), including the wonderful stanza: “For your sustenance manifested your sweetness towards your children; and the bread, ministering to the desire of the one who took it, was changed to suit everyone’s liking” (verse 21, NRSV). This passage, from the Old Testament’s youngest book (written just 100 years before Christ), is a meditation on what God did for the Israelites as reported in Exodus 16 and Numbers 11. God fed his people with manna, the food of angels, the bread from heaven, which covered the ground like snow and ice but did not melt in the sun (the fire of Wisdom 16:22–23). The Egyptians were the enemies, the uninstructed souls (17:1), whom God pursued with a pillar of fire even through rain and sea.

We, the new Israelites, believe that the Eucharistic Bread and Wine are ready to eat, providing every pleasure and suited to every taste. They manifest God’s sweetness toward us, his children; through them God ministers to the desire of the one who eats and drinks them, changing to suit everyone’s liking. Skillfully playing the stringed instrument of creation, God changes bread and wine into all forms: They serve God’s all-nourishing bounty, according to the desire of those who have need, so that we, whom God loves, might learn that it is not the production of crops that feeds humankind (“not by bread alone”) but that God’s Word sustains those who trust in him. As a Passionist missionary once preached as part of a Forty Hours Devotion, if we dare God to meet our deepest needs and desires, God shapes the Eucharist to our tastes, pleasures, desires, likings, needs.

By the way, for older Catholics this theology is not really a surprise. We grew up singing Wisdom 16:20 at Benediction: Æ Panem de caelo praestitisti eis. Î Omne delectamentum in se habentem (Æ You gave them bread from heaven. Î Containing within itself all sweetness). But did any of us realize in those days what we were singing about the Eucharist?

What about Communion Hymns?

I love hymns—I love their words, their tunes, their harmonizations. My life has been saved (only a slight exaggeration) by “The Call” by George Herbert, with the incomparable tune by Ralph Vaughan Williams; “Bread of Heav’n, on Thee We Feed” by Josiah Conder; Melvin Farrell’s “Father, God of All Things Living”; “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” by Horatius Bonar; and—an 8.5 on the spiritual Richter scale—“By Gracious Powers So Wonderfully Sheltered,” with lyrics by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and F. Pratt Green, set to a most gorgeous tune, Le Cenacle, by Joseph Gelineau—to name just five hymns.

Consider just the first of these for a moment.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

The first line of each stanza enumerates three titles of our Lord, and the following three lines meditate on each title. The rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef. The economy of expression is breathtaking. The theological and spiritual trajectory moves us from “way” to “love.” (As a molested boy, I needed to know that the Eucharist “killeth death,” “mends in length,” “makes his guest,” and joys in love.)

This poem, turned to music, becomes a hymn in the strict sense I am using here: strophic, rhymed, and a complete theological statement or shape. The most important part of this “definition” is “a complete theological statement.” A number of great hymns are trinitarian in shape: Verse 1: the Father, Verse 2: the Son, Verse 3: the Spirit—hence the saying among Protestants: “As lonely
In our Catholic tradition, hymns are not sung in procession . . .

as a third verse [or: the Holy Spirit] in a Catholic church.” Some songs are not hymns as rhymed texts, but many songs are strophic in the loose sense: refrain and verses.

According to this definition, there is only one hymn required at Mass except during Advent and Lent: the Gloria (Glory to God). It isn’t (obviously) strophic, it isn’t rhymed, but it’s a complete theological statement. Few would dare sing an abbreviated Gloria.

One more point: In our Catholic tradition, hymns are not sung in procession—there are “no players in motion” in what our liturgy calls “an independent rite or act.” The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (37) says:

a. Some constitute an independent rite or act, such as the Gloria, the responsorial Psalm, the Alleluia and verse before the Gospel [yes, the ministers in the Gospel procession are moving, but we aren’t], the Sanctus, the Memorial Acclamation, and the song after communion;

b. Others accompany another rite, such as the chants at the Entrance, at the Offertory, at the fraction (Agnus Dei), and at Communion.

So the argument I am making is that, because the Communion song accompanies the receiving of Communion and thus needs to be over when the Communion procession is over, a psalm or canticle is the best kind of song to sing during Communion, especially if its antiphon/refrain is a quotation from the Gospel of the day. This means that any version of “Taste and See” is a good choice for a generic Communion procession song, because the text comes from Psalm 34.

As for other songs popular at Communion, Dan Schutte’s “Table of Plenty” is a thoughtful pastiche of biblical citations and allusions good for singing on the summer Sundays in Years A and B that focus on the Bread of Life (John 6). Similarly, Jacques Berthier’s “Eat This Bread, Drink This Cup” is perfect for singing on those same Sundays in Year B.

More generic still are Owen Alstott’s “Lord, Jesus Christ, Gather Us Together”; Marty Haugen’s “Now in This Banquet”; and even Robert Kreutz’s “Gift of Finest Wheat.” These five hymns might continue service as good songs of praise after Communion. And they represent a ceiling, the ideal of singing the Communion. More than forty years ago the Vatican’s liturgy office answered the following letter:

Query: Many have inquired whether the rule still applies that appears in the Instruction on sacred music and the liturgy, 3 Sept. 1958, no. 33: “In low Masses religious songs of the people may be sung by the congregation, without prejudice, however, to the principle that they be entirely consistent with the particular parts of the Mass.” Reply: That rule has been superseded. What must be sung is the Mass, its Ordinary and Proper, not “something,” no matter how consistent, that is imposed on the Mass. Because the liturgical service is one, it has only one countenance, one motif, one voice, the voice of the Church. . . . Liturgical song involves not mere melody, but words, text, thought, and the sentiments that the poetry and music contain. Thus texts must be those of the Mass, not others, and singing means singing the Mass not just singing at Mass.

(If you read Italian, you can just see the writer touching thumb and two fingers together and gesturing: “Cantare la Messa, dunque, e non solo cantare durante la Messa.”)

To experience singing the Mass and not just singing at Mass, please study the “Songs for the Table” from Psallite (http://www.litpress.org/everyonesinging/Psallite.aspx). You will detect theological and spiritual resonance between the readings and the antiphons of Psallite’s songs for the table (Communion songs).

Life and Death

Revealing the power of the Eucharist is a matter of life and death for all of us in the pews, even the adolescent boys.

Learning the prayer language of the psalms and canticles is the best way to allow the Word of God to make a home in our hearts.

Notes

5. Psalm 34 is used twenty-eight times; Psalms 23, 98, 103, and 145 are used twenty-three times each; Psalm 19 is used twenty-two times; Psalm 33 is used twenty-one times; and Psalm 27 appears twenty times. Twenty-two psalms are not used at all in the Lectionary for Mass or the graduals. If you want the complete breakdown, you can e-mail me at paulfford@stjohnsem.edu.
6. Including the six traditional Hallel psalms (113, 114, 115, 116, 117, and 118). If you want the complete list, you can e-mail me at paulfford@stjohnsem.edu.
We are given the outline of the psalter for morning and evening prayer in the General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH), which specifies: “The psalmody of morning prayer consists of one morning psalm, then a canticle from the Old Testament and, finally, a second psalm of praise, following the tradition of the Church. The psalmody of evening prayer consists of two psalms (or two parts of a longer psalm) suited to the hour and to celebration with a congregation and a canticle from the letters of the apostles or from the Book of Revelation” (GILH, 43).

With this broad outline, let us take a deeper look at the assignment of particular psalms across the four weeks of the daily psalter, focusing on the two primary (or “hinge”) hours of prayer, seeking both patterns for our prayer and a deeper awareness of the God whom we seek to praise in the liturgy of the hours.

Psalms of the Morning

Sunday Morning Prayer in Week I brings us the quintessential “morning” psalm of the Western Church: Psalm 63. The translation of this text in The Revised Grail Psalms makes the reason for this choice clear:

O God, you are my God; at dawn I seek you; for you my soul is thirsting, for you my flesh is pining . . . .

Verse four of Psalm 5 on Monday in Week I makes its selection for morning prayer clear: “To you do I pray, O Lord./ In the morning you hear my voice;/ in the morning I plead and watch before you.”

Some psalms sing of the need for deliverance and then make an abrupt change to praise, as if the psalmist suddenly awoke from a disturbing dream. You can find that abrupt shift in Psalm 57:8–9, used on Thursday in Week I:

My heart is ready, O God;
my heart is ready.
I will sing; I will sing your praise.
Awake, my soul!
Awake, lyre and harp!
I will awake the dawn!

Some psalms used at morning prayer do not refer to morning explicitly but still seem to be appropriate for the beginning of the day. Psalm 51, the great “penitential psalm” used on Friday at morning prayer in Week I, provides the “invitatory” versicle and response for each day (51:17): “O Lord, open my lips,/ and my mouth shall proclaim your praise!”

Saturday mornings in the first week of the psalter for the hours gives us a chance to sing a section of the long
alphabetical Psalm 119 with specific morning references (119:147–148):

I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have hoped in your word.
My eyes awaken before dawn,
to ponder your promise.

Sometimes the morning relevance will be a reference to light: “O send forth your light and your truth;/ they will guide me on” (Psalm 43:3). Or, similarly, in Psalm 80: “O God of hosts, bring us back;/ let your face shine forth, and we shall be saved” (80:8).

Some psalms, such as Psalm 92, which is titled in the Hebrew “a song for the Sabbath,” have been sung in the morning since they were first used in the synagogue. Here the psalmist exclaims: “It is good to give thanks to the Lord,/ to make music to your name, O Most High,/ to proclaim your loving mercy in the morning . . .” (92:2–3a, used at on Sunday in Week II).

Some morning psalms refer to God metaphorically as the sun, as in Psalm 84:12: “For the Lord God is a sun, a shield;/ the Lord will give us his favor and glory.” In other places, a song about divine mercy, which has mentioned the difficulties of the night, will end by singing of the respite that comes with the daylight, as in Psalm 90:14 (used on Monday in Week IV): “At dawn, fill us with your merciful love;/ we shall exult and rejoice all our days.”

Some of the morning psalms actually repeat the same words as psalms we have sung earlier in the cursus. The words of Psalm 108:2–6, in fact, reiterate the end of Psalm 57:8–12 (see page twenty-two).

Morning psalms are not always psalms of praise or thanksgiving. They may well begin with lament for difficulties but transition into a request like this, found in Psalm 143:8: “In the morning, let me know your loving mercy,/ for in you I place my trust.” And every now and again, a psalm is chosen for its inclusion of the word “morning,” but in other ways it may seem slightly unusual in an office of praise. Take Psalm 101:8, for example: “Morning by morning I will destroy/ all the wicked in the land,/ uprooting from the city of the Lord/ all who do evil.”

In looking at the four-week cycle of morning prayer (see page twenty-four), we find that the “morning psalms” are prayed pretty much in the order in which they come in the psalter. Certain psalms are selected because of the day of the week. For example, the great paschal Psalm 118 is prayed twice, on the Lord’s Day in Weeks II and IV. The great psalm of repentance is sung as the morning psalm every Friday, the day when we commemorate our Lord’s passion and death. The scriptural “song for the Sabbath” is sung twice, on the Saturdays of Weeks II and IV.

**Morning Canticles and Psalms of Praise**

The inclusion of canticles (psalmodic material found in other books of the Bible rather than the Psalter) has been traditional for more than a thousand years at morning prayer. In the Roman (Latin) Rite immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council, there were two sets of Old Testament canticles: one set was sung on festive and “ordinary” days, and the other on penitential days. These canticles were added to by those who drew up the four-week psalter for the liturgy of the hours. The two “canticles of the three young men,” both from chapter three of the Book of Daniel, are assigned to the Lord’s Day: The “Benedicite omnia opera Domino” (Daniel 3:57–88) is sung on Sundays in Weeks I and III; the shorter “Benedictus es” (Daniel 3:52–57) is sung on Sundays in Weeks II and IV. The great psalm of repentance is sung as the morning psalm every Friday, the day when we commemorate our Lord’s passion and death. The scriptural “song for the Sabbath” is sung twice, on the Saturdays of Weeks II and IV.
will sprinkle clean water upon you/ to cleanse you from all your impurities,” on Saturday in Week IV. The other canticles are assigned to fill out the pattern in the morning psalter (i.e., morning psalm, Old Testament canticle, and psalm of praise).

Until the redistribution of the Psalter in the Breviarium Romanum (Roman Breviary), done in the pontificate of Pope St. Pius X, part of the morning office in both the Roman West and the Byzantine East was to conclude the morning psalms with “the Psalms of Praise”: Psalms 148, 149, and 150. These were fixed psalms, sung every day of the week. In 1911, the Roman Breviary broke up that set of psalms, assigning one “psalm of praise” to each day of the week, thus necessitating the addition of other psalms to that “praise” category. The Four-Week Psalter of the Liturgy of the Hours required twenty-eight such psalms.

The traditional Laudate psalms were saved for use on the Lord’s Day, and the following psalms, listed in order of their appearance in the Four-Week Psalter, were added to the category “Psalms of Praise”: In Week I—Psalms 29, 33, 47, 48, 100; in Week II—19A, 65, 97, 8, 147:12–20, and 8; in Week III—96, 67, 98, 99, and 117; in Week IV—135:1–12, 144:1–10, 146, and 147:1–11.

Psalms and Songs of the Evening

The quintessential evening psalm (141) is sung at Evening Prayer I of Sunday in Week I: “Let my prayer be accepted as incense before you;/ the raising of my hands like an evening oblation.” It is followed on that same evening by the next psalm in the psalter (142): “With all my voice I cry to the Lord;/ with all my voice I entreat the Lord.” These two psalms are part of the four fixed “lamp-lighting psalms” which occur every day of the week in the Byzantine celebration of Vespers.

The traditional psalms of pre-Vatican II Sunday Vespers (Psalms 110, 111, 112, 113, and 114, using the Hebrew counting) are now distributed over the Sundays of the Four-Week Psalter. Psalm 110:1–5, 7 appears at evening prayer II on all four Sundays. In order over the four weeks, the second psalm at evening prayer II is 114, 115, 111, and 112. The weekly assignment of Psalm 110 to all four weeks of the Sunday evening psalter shows how important this psalm, with its messianic overtones for Christians, is to the prayer of the Church.

In general, the psalms selected for Evening Prayer are explained by this passage in the General Instruction on the
When evening approaches and the day is already far spent, evening prayer is celebrated in order that [in the words of St. Basil the Great] “we may give thanks for what has been given us, or what we have done well, during the day.” We also recall the redemption through the prayer we send up “like incense in the Lord’s sight,” and in which “the raising up of our hands” becomes “an evening sacrifice.” This sacrifice [as St. John Cassian tells us] “may also be interpreted more spiritually as the true evening sacrifice that our Savior the Lord entrusted to the apostles at supper on the evening when he instituted the sacred mysteries of the Church or of the evening sacrifice of the next day, the sacrifice, that is, which, raising his hands, he offered to the Father at the end of the ages for the salvation of the whole world.” Again, [as St. Cyprian explains] in order to fix our hope on the light that knows no setting, “we pray and make petition for the light to come down on us anew; we implore the coming of Christ who will bring the grace of eternal light.” Finally, at this hour we join with the Churches of the East in calling upon the “joy-giving light of that holy glory, born of the immortal, heavenly Father, the holy and blessed Jesus Christ; now that we have come to the setting of the sun and have seen the evening star, we sing in praise of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . ” (GILH, 39).

A peculiarity of the psalms as prayed in evening prayer is the practice of singing a longer psalm but dividing it into two fairly equal parts, each with its own antiphon. The General Instruction gives permission for these to be sung either as they appear in the current book or in their original form (i.e., as an intact psalm with only one antiphon). The psalms which are prayed this way, as they appear across the weekdays of the Four-Week Psalter, are Psalm 27, 45, 49, 72, 132, 135, 136, 139, 144, and 145.

Another innovation of the post-Vatican II form of the liturgy of the hours is the addition of a series of New Testament canticles to the office of evening prayer. Unlike the canticles of Morning Prayer, the New Testament canticles are assigned to fixed days of the week across the Four-Week Psalter: Sunday EP I: Philippians Hymn; Sunday EP II: Revelation Hymn (Wedding of the Lamb), replaced in Lent by a text from 1 Peter; Monday EP: Ephesians Hymn; Tuesday EP: Revelation Hymn (O Lord our God, you are worthy); Wednesday EP: Colossians Hymn; Thursday EP: Revelation Hymn (We praise you, the Lord God almighty); Friday EP: Revelation Hymn (Mighty and wonderful are your works). These canticles bring a specific Christological and often eschatological element to the daily prayer, since at evening prayer we not only give thanks for the end of the day but also acknowledge Christ as “our true end.”

The Prayer of the Church

The very order of the texts in both morning and evening prayer has a purpose. The General Instruction informs us that “the constant rule of tradition is observed in the arrangement of the psalmody and the readings: first the Old Testament, then the Apostle, and finally the Gospel (i.e., the Gospel Canticle) is proclaimed” (GILH, 136). According to the Instruction (GILH, 127), those psalms have been selected which are more suitable for a celebration with the people. We are also told (GILH, 121) that “the psalms are not selected just to make up a certain quantity of prayer; rather, considerations of variety and the special character of each song are reflected in their choice.”

Entering more deeply into the psalms as the daily prayer of the Church is a task to which we are all called in celebrating the liturgy of the hours. May the Holy Spirit lead us in this endeavor, so that heart and mind may be united in offering this prayer through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to God our almighty Father!

Notes


2. The Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter, © 2010 Conception Abbey/ The Grail (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, Inc., 2010). The English translation in The Revised Grail Psalms was confirmed for use as a liturgical text by decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on March 19, 2010. This psalm translation will become the standard text for the psalms in all future English language liturgical books. This translation of the Psalter is used for all psalm quotations in this article.
Aidan Kavanagh famously described the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as the “norm” of initiation — the pattern and standard within which all the other rites of initiation should be understood. The RCIA celebrates the initiation of a Christian in a process that is thoroughly grounded in the paschal mystery, involves participation by the whole community, includes an extended period of catechesis and formation in the Christian life, is nourished by celebrations of God’s Word, requires conversion to the way of Christ, and culminates in a unitive celebration of the Easter sacraments — baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

Songs for the Journey

When inquirers are formally admitted to the catechumenate, the priest extends this invitation: “N. and N., come into the church, to share with us at the table of God’s Word” (RCIA, 60). New catechumens are given a place among the community of believers, because formation in the Christian way of life and preparation for sacramental initiation takes place in the midst of and with the active participation of the community. They are not simply given seats but places at “the table of God’s Word.” Both the catechumens and the faithful are nourished in their faith journey by celebrations of God’s Word, including “first, celebrations held specially for the catechumens; second, participation in the liturgy of the Word at the Sunday Mass; third, celebrations held in connection with catechetical instruction” (RCIA, 81).

The initiation rite establishes an important principle: that formation and catechesis for catechumens and faithful alike find their primary context in celebrations of the Word of God. At its heart the Christian life is marked by an encounter with Jesus Christ, who is really present and speaking when the Scriptures are proclaimed and celebrated in the liturgical assembly. The Scriptures are clearly not the only source of catechesis, which must also draw from and reflect on the living tradition of the Church. Nonetheless, celebrations of the Word are the proper context for catechetical formation in the Catholic faith and Christian life.

An integral element in celebrations of God’s Word is the singing of one or more psalms, most often in responsorial style. As they sing the psalms, God gives catechumens and faithful “words to speak to him, to place our lives before him, and thus to make life itself a path to God. In the psalms we find expressed every possible human feeling set masterfully in the sight of God; joy and pain, distress and hope, fear and trepidation: here all find expression.”

The psalms that the assembled community sings at celebrations of the Word connect their joys and struggles to the life-giving presence of God at work in the hearts of its members. Each time that catechumens gather with the community to celebrate God’s Word, they join in these songs for the journey.

The responsorial psalms for Sundays and major feasts are particularly important in the formation of catechumens and in the ongoing spiritual growth of the faithful. Some of these psalms have long been associated with various mysteries of the Christian faith and have helped generations of believers to reflect more deeply on them. For example, Psalm 98, sung on Christmas Day and throughout the Christmas Season, makes no reference to a baby but rather calls out to the sea, the rivers, the hills, the world, and all its creatures, to rejoice “at the presence of the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth” (Ps 98:9). When the liturgical assembly makes this song its own during the celebration of the Word on Christmas, it proclaims the mystery of Christ’s birth as the coming of the mighty God who brings saving power to the entire world: “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Ps 98:3b). At the same time, the community uses the words of the psalm to voice its response to the coming of Christ:

Dr. J. Michael McMahon is the president of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.
Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn,
raise a shout before the King, the Lord (Ps. 98:5–6).

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) connects the pastoral and liturgical significance of the responsorial psalm to its role in fostering meditation on the Word of God. On many Sundays, especially during Ordinary Time, the responsorial psalm and its refrain provide an interpretive key to the Gospel of the day that draws the assembly into deeper reflection. For example, when the Gospel parable of the sower and the seed is proclaimed on the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, the responsorial psalm is drawn from Psalm 65 and is sung with the refrain, “The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.” The psalm sings of God the farmer, who waters generously, softens the ground, and prepares the grain to yield a harvest that is bountiful and abundant. What a rich source of reflection for catechumens and all who hear the well-known parable!

Because the psalms are so important in the formation of catechumens—and in the ongoing formation of the entire community—psalmists and other music leaders have an enormous responsibility to be sure that musical settings are chosen with care, proclaimed with conviction, and led with skill. They should likewise collaborate with catechists so that the responsorial psalms of the Sunday liturgy and those sung at other celebrations of the Word may be integrated into catechesis and become a richer source for unpacking the meaning of God’s Word for the life of Christian believers. Homilists have an important role to play as well in bringing to bear the richness of the psalms in connecting the message of the Scriptures to the lives of catechumens and the rest of the faithful.

Psalms for the Rites

The celebration of God’s Word is an integral element in each of the various rites of initiation, beginning with the Rite of Acceptance in the Order of Catechumens and culminating in the extended liturgy of the Word at the Easter Vigil, when the three sacraments of initiation are celebrated. As the responsorial psalms for each of these rites help to “foster meditation on the word of God,” they also invite deeper reflection on the meaning of the ritual actions that are about to take place.
Unlike most other rites of the Church, nearly all of the initiation rites are connected to specific days of the liturgical year. It is no accident that the sacraments of initiation are often referred to as the “Easter sacraments.” When considering the psalms that are sung on these days, it is worth recalling that the ritual celebrations are imbued with the spirit of the seasons and that the seasons draw much of their meaning from the celebration of the rites. The responsorial psalms for these occasions are thus related not only to the other Scripture passages but also to the season or feast and to the rite that is being celebrated.

When viewed together, the psalms that are appointed for the initiation rites or for the days on which they are celebrated provide rich fare for reflection on the meaning of sacramental initiation and its many facets, above all on the Christian life into which men and women are being formed and into which they are to be admitted. This topic alone could be the topic for a book, so I will instead offer just a taste of various themes of initiation and some of the psalms for the rites that reflect these themes and invite deeper reflection on them.

**Call and Election by God.** The Church’s understanding of initiation is based on the firm conviction that it is God who acts first in summoning men and women to faith and new life in Christ. This aspect is reflected in the choice of Psalm 33 (refrain: “Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own”) as the responsorial psalm for the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and as an option for singing during the ritual action of enrollment of names at the Rite of Election.

**Entrance into God’s Holy People.** The initiation rites are thoroughly ecclesial, involving the participation of the entire community of the faithful and gradually incorporating a person into the community and its mission. This aspect is also reflected in the singing of Psalm 33 (see above) at the first two major rites of the adult initiation, the Rite of Acceptance and the Rite of Election.

**Incorporation into the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Death and Resurrection.** Several of the responsorial psalms sung at the Easter Vigil provide opportunities for reflection on sacramental initiation into the dying and rising of Christ, such as the Canticle of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15) after the third reading and the stirring verses from Psalm 118 sung with the solemn Alleluia immediately before the Gospel of the resurrection.

**Conversion.** The initiation process summons catechumens through a gradual transformation of mind and heart to a new way of life in accordance with the Gospel. This challenge is reflected strongly in the responsorial psalm sung at the First Scrutiny, celebrated on the Third Sunday of Lent: Psalm 95 (refrain: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts”).

**Forgiveness of Sins.** Each Sunday we “confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” Several responsorial psalms during the initiation process reflect this theme, including Psalm 130 (refrain: “With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption”), sung at the Third Scrutiny on the Fifth Sunday of Lent.

A number of other aspects of initiation could also be connected to the psalms sung during the celebration of God’s Word at the various rites, including the significance of water, enlightenment or illumination, adoption as sons and daughters of God, the action of the Holy Spirit in transforming minds and hearts, and the call of the baptized to take up the mission of Christ.

**Pastoral Leadership**

Throughout the initiation journey and particularly during the celebration of its rites, musicians, clergy, catechists, and other pastoral leaders should pay close attention to the psalms that are sung during celebrations of God’s Word and during the ritual actions. These sung texts are a key to reflection not only for those being initiated but also for the entire community of believers who are called to lifelong deepening of their baptism.

**Notes**

4. See the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal,* 61.
5. Ibid.
In his book *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, Walter Brueggemann wrote that “Israel’s struggle with God’s *hesed* (steadfast love)—in suffering and hope, in lament and in hymn, in candor and in gratitude—and eventual acceptance of God’s *hesed* as the premise of life permit Israel to make the move from the obedience of Psalm 1 to the doxology of Psalm 150.”

Something similar may be said of Christian marriage. A couple’s struggle with the promise to love one another all the days of their life—in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health—and their acceptance of God’s love as the foundation of their marriage permit the couple to move from the vows made in the wedding liturgy to a life of deep consolation, gratitude, and praise.

In the words of the psalms, couples can find a voice that resonates with the myriad experiences that arise as the sacrament of marriage unfolds over time from hope to lament to thanksgiving to praise. The seven psalms for marriage in the *Lectionary for Mass* echo the joy and thanksgiving of a wedding or marriage anniversary but also offer wisdom for where true happiness may be found over the lifetime of a marriage.

**Psalm 33:12 and 18, 20–21, 22**

Psalm 33 is from the genre of psalms known as hymns, which are described by Sister Irene Nowell, osb as “the response of wonder and awe . . . the song of a heart filled with gratitude that this great and wonderful God loves us so much.” Unlike the versions of this psalm used on Sundays and feasts, which begin with verse 1 or 4, this version begins with verse 12, which describes as blessed “the nation whose God is the Lord,/ the people he has chosen.” Just as God chose Israel to be his people, so God is the author of married love, as a young couple said so eloquently in the video *Our Catholic Wedding* (Liturgy Training Publications, 2001). Like spouses who gaze lovingly at each other, verse 18 tells us that “the Lord’s eyes are on those who fear him.”

The refrain for Psalm 33 sings of the earth as being “full of the goodness of the Lord.” This positive worldview, which seems so natural amid the joy of a wedding or anniversary celebration, can be obscured over the course of a marriage by daily challenges, times of darkness, and the lure of material wealth. The second and third sections of the psalm remind the couple that the lifetime of happiness they so deeply desire comes from trust and hope in the Lord, who “is our help and our shield.”

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Psalm 34:2–3, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9

Psalm 34 is classified as a song of thanksgiving which “tells the story of a special deliverance” and includes “a strong awareness of dependence on God for everything—life, breath, relief from pain, joy.” In the unique context of a wedding or anniversary celebration, the spouses thank God for delivering them into each other’s lives; marriage is a life-long gift for which the faithful couple will want to “bless the L ORD at all times.” The unselfish love and commitment that are at the heart of Christian marriage symbolize both the relationship between Christ and the Church and also the covenant between God and God’s people. Through their intimate relationship, spouses come to know better the intimacy of God’s love; they “taste and see that the L ORD is good.”

Psalm 34 also presents an image of God as particularly concerned for the poor. God hears the poor (the “lowly”) when they call out and saves them from their distress (v. 7), and the joyful praise of the one giving thanks gladdens the humble (v. 3). In the wedding liturgy, the couple is reminded that their marriage is to reflect God’s love for the poor: “May you be witnesses in the world to God’s charity,/ so that the afflicted and needy who have known your kindness/ may one day receive you thankfully/ into the eternal dwelling of God.”

Psalm 103:1–2, 8 and 13, 17–18a

Psalm 103—a hymn—appears many times in the Lectionary for Mass but not always with the same verses. The verses in this version are particularly poignant for a wedding or anniversary celebration. God is presented as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, rich in mercy, and just—characteristics that the Scriptures and prayer texts of the Rite of Marriage commend to the couple. When the spouses reflect these characteristics in their marriage, they help each other to see the face of God. When they do this as parents and grandparents, they help their children (v. 13) and their children’s children (v. 17) to know the God of this psalm.

Psalm 112:1bc–2, 3–4, 5–7a, 7b–8, 9

Considered by many to be a wisdom psalm, Psalm 112 uses the acrostic form “in which every verse . . . begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.” This psalm focuses not on God but on the person “who fears the L ORD.” The blessings of posterity, wealth, and riches in the first few lines of this psalm have to be understood against the backdrop of the far lengthier descriptions of this person in the rest of the psalm: upright, generous, merciful, just, steadfast, trusting in the L ORD, lavishly generous to the poor. Other texts of the wedding liturgy help to put the intent of this psalm in perspective for the Christian couple: “For those you created out of charity/ you call to the law of charity without ceasing.” The wealth and riches of marriage are not found in lavish possessions but rather in the unceasing love of God, of each other, of family, and of the poor.

Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5

Psalm 128—another wisdom psalm—appears with these same verses for the Feast of the Holy Family (Year A). As on that feast, this psalm at a wedding or anniversary celebration extols the joys of daily family life. The one who walks in the ways of the L ORD “shall eat the fruit” that comes from work, and happiness will come from one’s spouse and children. Prosperity in married life is not presented as the accumulation of material wealth but rather as the fundamental happiness that comes from satisfying work and a loving family. Such happiness in work and family life cannot be assumed; the psalm reminds the couple and the entire assembly that they are a gift from God, and those who enjoy this gift are considered “blessed.” When suffering arises, as it inevitably does in every family, the couple can return to this psalm to be reassured of God’s desire for their happiness all the days of their life.

Psalm 145:8–9, 10 and 15, 17–18

Four of the seven marriage psalms are hymns, and Psalm 145 is the third of the four. This psalm appears several times in the Lectionary for Mass, but as with other psalms, the verses designated for marriage are somewhat unique. They begin with verses 8–9, which announce that God is “good . . . to all,/ compassionate to all his creatures,” and end with the assurance in verses 17–18 that the “L ORD is close to all who call him.” While the celebration may be focused on the couple, the psalm reminds the assembly of the universal nature of God’s love. The middle section of the psalm—verses 10 and 15—urges
those who are the recipients of God’s love to respond by giving thanks, blessing, and looking with hope to the Lord. The Rite of Marriage picks up this theme when, in speaking about the couple, it prays, “In happiness may they praise you, O Lord./ in sorrow may they seek you out . . . .” The image of married life in this hymn is that of a relationship between a merciful, compassionate God and a grateful, hopeful couple.

Psalm 148:1–2, 3–4, 9–10, 11–13a, 13c–14a

The Bible’s last three psalms are hymns of unbridled praise. This is the first of the three, and the verses designated for marriage invite praise from everything and everyone in the heavens and on the earth. The Nuptial Blessing in Mass A proclaims that the companionship of husband and wife “is endowed with the one blessing/ not forfeited by original sin/ nor washed away by the flood,” and this psalm expresses the gratitude of the couple and the assembly for this blessing in words of praise to God. In his commentary on Psalm 148, Saint Augustine urges those who sing this psalm in church to praise God “with the whole of yourselves . . . let each one of you not cease to live a good life, and then he or she will be praising God all the time.” The wedding liturgy and marriage anniversaries lift up the praise of God that is sung in ritual celebration and lived out in married life.

Notes

3. Psalm quotations are taken from The Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter © 2010 Conception Abbey/The Grail, administered by GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638, USA. All rights reserved.
4. Fear of the Lord, as described by Father Richard Clifford, sj, “does not mean craven fear or mere obedience to a set of commandments but a way of life that sets God above all” (The Collegeville Bible Commentary [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1989], 781).
5. Nowell, 71.

Lucy Douglass (1788–1873), The Royal Psalmist, watercolor and ink, Plymouth, Massachusetts, c. 1805.
It is unlikely that many participants in the rites of ordination or religious profession (even those being ordained or making profession) remember the exact verses of the psalm sung at a particular rite, but it is quite likely that they will remember the psalm antiphon, repeated several times, especially if it is set to a strong and memorable tune. So in looking at the responsorial psalms for these rites, we’re going to focus on the antiphons, for they tell the story about how the Church perceives the similarities and differences among these life commitments.

For the Admission to Candidacy for the Diaconate and the Priesthood

This initial step toward ordination is presented as a kind of threshold moment, an initial response to a divine call that must be examined and accepted and then acted on by completing a period of preparation so that, in due time, the candidate will be ready for ordained ministry. The responsorial psalms assigned for this rite in the Lectionary for Mass illustrate both the tentative nature of this moment and the commitment it calls forth and expresses. So the antiphon for Psalm 16, based on 16:5a, affirms the candidate’s faith that “you are my inheritance, O Lord,” while the psalm itself sings of the need for God’s help in maintaining this belief: “Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge” (16:1b).

The tentative nature of this step toward ordination is also suggested by the refrain for Psalm 24: “Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face,” based on 24:6. The psalm verses offer a challenge to those who would make this step: “Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?/ Who shall stand in his holy place?/ The clean of hands and pure of heart,/ whose soul is not set on vain things,/ who has not sworn deceitful words” (24:3–4).

The final option for a responsorial psalm places the movement toward ordination within the cosmic context of God’s self-revelation: “The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power” (refrain based on Psalm 98:2b). This joyful shout of praise acts as reassurance to those who must still face a rigorous preparation for the ministry they hope to undertake, and it invites them to join in the song of the heavenly court echoed throughout the ages: “Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp,/ with the harp and the sound of song,/ With trumpets and the sound of the horn,/ raise a shout before the King, the Lord” (98:5–6).

For the Conferral of Holy Orders

Through their antiphons, the responsorial psalms for ordination to diaconate, priesthood, or episcopate tell a different story. They suggest a firm assurance that one has taken the right step because the candidate in one of these rites has learned to trust in and rely on the Lord. They also suggest that this ministry involves a commitment to preach the Word, follow the Lord’s commandments, and minister the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The psalms of assurance are Psalm 23, 84, and 89. They affirm that the ordinand believes that “the Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want” (Psalm 23:1),...
and that those who “dwell in your house, O Lord,” are “blessed” (Psalm 84:5a). With such assurance, what can one do except sing the goodness of the Lord forever (see Psalm 89:2a)?

It is interesting that most of the antiphons for the psalms that speak of ministerial commitment in this rite seem to draw the Old Testament psalms right into a New Testament perspective. For example, they remind those about to be ordained as deacons, priests, or bishops that their mission is to “go out to the world and teach all nations” (antiphon for Psalm 96, based on Matthew 28:19; see also the antiphon for Psalm 117, based on Mark 16:15). In all things, the ordained must offer themselves as examples of fidelity, for their union with God is conditional: “You are my friends, says the Lord, if you do what I command you” (antiphon for Psalm 100, based on John 15:14). Key to the ministry of the ordained is the Eucharist, which is offered, as Psalm 110’s first antiphon reminds us, by the “whole Christ”: “Christ the Lord, a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek, offered bread and wine” (110:4b). The effect of that offering, of course, is union with Christ’s self-sacrifice: “Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ” (antiphon for Psalm 116, based on 1 Corinthians 10:16).

For the Consecration of Virgins and Religious Profession

The “order of virgins” is one of the most ancient of dedicated groups in the Church. Paul suggests (1 Corinthians 7:25–26) that virgins remain unmarried as a sign of the imminent arrival of the reign of God, and consecrated virginity has always held that eschatological sense of anticipating the reign of God. Religious profession, on the other hand, is a relatively recent development, since religious orders—apart from the ordained ministries, virgins, and widows—didn’t develop until they grew out of the monastic movement in the Eastern Church, beginning in the fourth century. Like the earlier practice of dedicated virginity, the professed religious life—committed to the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience—has an eschatological anticipation, seeking to find in shared life and the vows a taste of heaven and of the communion of the saints.

The antiphons for the responsorial psalms used in these rites certainly reflect that future orientation. “Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face” orients Psalm 24, just as it does in the rite of admission to candidacy for holy orders. Psalm 27 also reflects that longing: “I long to see your face, O Lord” (27:8b). So, too, does Psalm 33. The text of the antiphon isn’t obviously future-directed—“Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own” (33:12)—but the psalm verses chosen for this rite end with a future hope: “Our soul is waiting for the Lord. / He is our help and our shield. / In him do our hearts find joy. / We trust in his holy name” (33:20–21). Psalm 63’s antiphon describes this present life as a “thirsting” for union with God: “My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God” (63:2b). On the other hand, the antiphon associated with Psalm 45 proclaims a kind of “proleptic” eschatology, that is, an anticipation right now of the communion that will mark full union in the reign of God: “The bridegroom is here! / let us go out to meet Christ the Lord” (based on Matthew 25:6; italics added).

Since prayer in common and in private is traditionally a key part of the vowed life, other responsorial psalms focus on the joy of prayer, even constant prayer: “I will bless the Lord at all times” (Psalm 34:2a, which may be used for two sets of verses from Psalm 34). As those to be ordained are reminded by the antiphon for Psalm 100 that they are to do God’s will, so the antiphon for Psalm 40 reminds those committing themselves to the vowed life that this is a key aspect of their commitment: “Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will” (40:8a and 9a).

And finally, whether in the future reign of God or in the present, when we “see in a mirror dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12), it is a joy to be in the divine presence: “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God” (antiphon for Psalm 84, based on verse 2).

Notes

1. The texts of the antiphons are taken from the Lectionary for Mass (2002), © 2002 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Psalm verses are taken from The Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter © 2010 Conception Abbey/ The Grail, administered by GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638, USA. All rights reserved.

2. “Eschatology” is the Christian view of history that includes and takes account of the end of time—the “eschaton” (Greek: the “end”)—that is, the final outcome of the universe and humanity according to God’s plan.
The Church’s funeral rites call for the engagement of the Christian community in a ministry of consolation and in a gradual process of commending their deceased member—through Scripture readings, prayers, symbols, gestures, processions, songs, and psalms—to God's loving embrace and “into the welcoming company” of the angels and saints, “who need faith no longer, but see God face to face” (Order of Christian Funerals [OCF], 206). 1 The psalms play a key role in these rites. They contain genuine expressions of grief and pain in the face of death and inspire trust and hope in time of trial. They enable us to pray the very words of faith, consolation, and redemption that Jesus himself used in his earthly life (cf. OCF, 25). You will not find in them any canned, death-denying pietism that is completely out of touch with the feelings of the bereaved. Instead they express human grief and torment in very concrete language while boldly confessing trust in God and affirming faith in a Savior who wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus and who, though recoiling from death in the garden, with a love stronger than death gave up his life that we might share life for ever with him and all the saints, who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

Two months before my mother’s death, my brother Tom asked what she would like sung at her funeral. She replied: “What about that song your father used to sing: ‘We’re glad to see you go, you old rascal you’?” My mom, a woman of great faith, who with my dad raised eight children, could never be accused of maudlin, self-pitying sentimentality. Her answer, though meant to get a laugh, showed an awareness that she was about to embark on a journey, and it reassured us that she was at peace and ready for her passing from this life to the next. Two months later her final hours were marked by her reception of Viaticum—the food for the journey to the heavenly kingdom—and with prayer and the reading of psalms and other texts from Scripture. Through the community’s prayer for her during her illness, their visitation, and the celebration of Communion, anointing, and Viaticum, she had the good fortune of knowing that she was not alone in her journey to death. In the various funeral rites celebrated over the next three days, the simple yet eloquent texts of psalms and antiphons offered consoling, faith-filled words to those of us who mourned our loss, and they gave fitting expression to the believing community’s act of commending her on that final mysterious journey to the next life, a life already begun in the waters of baptism.

Twenty-Five Psalms

The twenty-five psalms designated for use in the various funeral rites display a rich diversity of genre, theme, and content in keeping with the many and varied circumstances of death and the variety of rites provided in the Order of Christian Funerals—from prayers for gathering in the presence of the body, to rites for keeping vigil for the deceased, to the rite accompanying the transfer of the
body to the church, to the rite of reception of the body of the deceased, to the funeral liturgy, and to the final rite of committal. Twelve of these psalms are designated for use as responsorial psalms (Psalm 23, 25, 27, 42 and 43, 63, 103, 116, 122, 130, 143, and 148), and the complete text of seventeen psalms (Psalm 23, 25, 42, 51, 93, 114–116, 118–119, 121–123, 126, 130, 132, and 134) are provided for use in various places within the rites—e.g., at the conclusion of the rites and especially as processional songs for the conclusion of the funeral liturgy and for the procession to the place of committal.

Among these twenty-five psalms there are four psalms of confidence (Psalm 23, 27, 115, and 121). In these four psalms we find vivid expressions of faith and trust in the face of pain, struggle, and death itself. Psalm 23:4 affirms that “though I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death,/ no evil would I fear, for you are with me.” Psalm 27:3 and 13 state boldly: “Though an army encamp against me,/ my heart would not fear. . . . I believe I shall see the Lord’s goodness/ in the land of the living.”

There are also nine psalms of lament (Psalm 25, 42, 43, 51, 63, 123, 126, 130, and 143), especially appropriate for the time immediately following death, when the family and close friends are faced with heartrending grief. These laments speak of deep pain and sorrow in the context of abiding faith in the mercy of God. Thus the Psalmist calls out in Psalm 25: “Relieve the anguish of my heart” in the context of affirming that “the Lord’s paths are mercy and faithfulness.” We hear the Psalmist’s lament in Psalm 42:4: “My tears have become my bread,/ by day, by night,” but in verse nine we read: “By day the Lord decrees/ his merciful love.” In Psalm 130:1 the Psalmist cries out from the depths yet affirms in verse seven the hope that “with the Lord there is mercy” and “plentiful redemption.” Where else but in the singing of the antiphon “May the angels lead you into paradise” with Psalm 25, at the conclusion of the funeral liturgy, does the consoling belief in the communion of saints find such profoundly human expression, giving meaning and significance, at a very poignant moment, to the connection between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven?

Psalms 116 and 118, both psalms of thanksgiving, are suggested for use at the concluding procession of the funeral liturgy. Both texts proclaim God’s acts of deliverance, both confidently give thanks for the Lord’s salvation, both express for the Christian imagination images of an afterlife. Consider Psalm 116:8–9: God “has kept my soul from death,/ my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling./ I will walk in the presence of the Lord/ in the land of the living”; or Psalm 118:13, 17, 19: “I was thrust down, thrust down and falling,/ but the Lord was my helper. . . . I shall not die, I shall live/ and recount the deeds of the Lord. . . . Open to me the gates of justice:/ I will enter and thank the Lord.”

Seven psalms for funerals are hymns (93, 103, 114, 122, 146, 148, and 150). Psalm 103, a responsorial psalm or an appropriate concluding song for use at the vigil for the deceased, praises the mercy and compassion of the Lord, “who forgives all your sins,/ who heals every one of your ills,/ who redeems your life from the grave” (103:3–4). Psalm103: 20–22 concludes with an eschatological vision in which the psalmist invokes earth and heaven, angels and all God’s works, to join in blessing the Lord.

Songs of a Pilgrim

The Order of Christian Funerals also includes two wisdom psalms—Psalm 119 (all 176 verses) and Psalm132. Psalm 119:19 reminds us that each of us is “a pilgrim in the land,” challenged to “walk in the way of [God’s] commands” (119:32), called to “walk in the law of the Lord” (119:1)—a law summed up in the two great commands: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself . . . . do this and you will live” (Luke 10:27–28).3

It is no coincidence, either, that six of these twenty-five Psalms (Psalm121, 122, 123, 130, 132, and 134) are among the collection of psalms (Psalm 120–134) referred to in the Book of Psalms as “songs of ascent” and otherwise classified by Scripture scholars as “Pilgrim Psalms.” Though the Pilgrim Psalms in themselves do not constitute a distinct

Photo by Lance Leong
literary genre, they are united by a common theme and focus, insofar as they likely served as songs during the pilgrimage and final ascent to Jerusalem, the holy city of the Lord. In the Christian application of these psalms, the Christian faithful—the people of the New Israel—see in these texts the image of their life-long pilgrimage and final, joyful ascent to the holy mountain of the Lord, the new and eternal Jerusalem. Look at the question and its faithful answer in Psalm 121: “I lift up my eyes to the mountains;/ from where shall come my help?/ My help shall come from the Lord . . . .” Hear the solid assurance of Psalm 122: “I rejoiced when they said to me,/ ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’ And now our feet are standing/ within your gates, O Jerusalem.” Or the imagery of Psalm 123: “To you I have lifted up my eyes,/ you who dwell in the heavens.”

Obstacles to Overcome

I need not enumerate the obstacles that stand in the way of singing the psalms not only at the funeral Mass but also in the other funeral rites. Responsorial settings of the psalms certainly are plentiful; but processional psalm settings or settings of whole psalms used at the conclusion of the various funeral rites do not abound. In rites other than the funeral liturgy a growing corpus of simple settings of psalm refrains and antiphons, along with simple psalm tones requiring only a cantor to lead the singing, would be most welcome. In writing this article, I was reminded of the words of Dr. Horace Allen, who in his 1983 address to the National Association of Pastoral Musicians challenged us to take the “psalms seriously in every way possible, with all the musical freedom [we] can muster, as [our] most important inspiration and guideline for how the musical events of Christian worship are to happen.”4 In the Christian community’s exercise of its ministry of consolation and in the celebration of the Church’s rites for the deceased, this is a challenge worthy of all our talent and effort.

Notes

1. Quotations from The Order of Christian Funerals © 1985, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation. All rights reserved.
2. Psalm quotations are taken from The Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter © 2010 Conception Abbey/ The Grail, administered by GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638, USA. All rights reserved.
Long before the time of the New Testament, the rabbis combed the Bible for a “hint” (remez), a “seeking” (drash), or a “secret” (sod) that God might have hidden in the text; this form of interpretation or commentary is called midrash. This practice is clear in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) that we have today, as later writers tried to understand and reinterpret the Torah, the Exodus, and other key moments in Jewish history in light of current events. Sometimes they did this by quoting a text directly—sometimes using the explicit cue “as it is written”—and applying that text to the current situation. But at other times, they looked for “hidden” meanings in older texts that would help to make sense of their history or apply that history when it didn’t seem to make sense. Benjamin Sommer explains that, to these writers and to the rabbis, “the word of God is not like the word of a human; divine speech is infinitely more meaningful.” Divine language is “supercharged with meaning,” and discovering that additional meaning is a “biblical means of relating to the Bible, which the rabbis inherited from the biblical authors themselves.”

Jesus is shown taking this approach in, for example, his interpretation of the prohibition of work on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1–8) or the story of Jonah (Matthew 12:38–40). In fact, most of the New Testament is a work of interpreting Jewish history and hopes in light of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and applying that interpretation to the current experience of fledgling Christian communities.

This search for “hidden” or “broader” meaning in the texts is a constant in Judaism and Christianity, described in recent Christian biblical study as a search for the “sensus plenior” (or, in its more recent and even broader use, the “fuller sense”). The great scholar Father Raymond Brown, ss, (1928–1998) was a staunch defender of the “sensus plenior” at a time when other scholars disputed this approach and even denied that there was a “wider sense” to be found in the biblical text. But this approach was affirmed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission and was described by the Commission in words almost identical to Father Brown’s own definition of the term. This “fuller sense,” they wrote in 1994, is “a deeper meaning of the text, intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author. Its existence in the biblical text comes to be known when one studies the text in the light of other biblical texts which utilize it or in its relationship with the internal development of revelation.”

Less Plenior

Why, then, would scholars like Father Roland Murphy, o. carm., (1917–2002)—one of the editors with Father Brown of the Jerome Biblical Commentary—be critical of such an ancient way of interpreting the Bible? Father Murphy was teaching at The Catholic University of America in the 1960s, at the same time that Father Brown...
was teaching forty miles away, at St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore, yet Father Murphy often discouraged a *sensus plenior* interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

When he was teaching at Catholic University, Father Murphy began each class in his course on the Hebrew Bible by choosing a student to pray one of the psalms. After the prayer, the student would then offer an interpretation of the text, and Father Murphy would add his own comments.

One day, a Christian Brother was chosen to pray and comment on a psalm. He chose Psalm 110 and proceeded to interpret it in *sensus plenior* fashion as a prophecy about Jesus Christ, drawing in part on its use in the New Testament (see Matthew 22:41–46). When the student finished his analysis, Father Murphy, at his full height (he was well over six feet tall), bent over the student’s desk and declared: “Those are very pious thoughts, Brother, but *you won’t find Jesus Christ in the Hebrew Bible!”

The point Father Murphy was making, of course, is that you can find descriptions of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible, and you can find passages that were applied to Jesus, but the person and mission of Jesus of Nazareth was something unexpected. Jesus fit no mold, not even that of Isaiah’s “suffering servant.” Indeed, the only phrase from the Bible that Jesus regularly applied to himself, it appears, is “son of man.” As “ben adam” was used in the Book of Numbers, in the Psalms, or in the prophets, it usually meant simply “a human being” or, sometimes, as it appeared in Ezekiel and—in its Aramaic equivalent—in the Book of Daniel, it meant a unique person, perhaps a representative of all humanity.

Father Murphy’s opposition, like that of other biblical scholars, to wide-ranging applications of the *sensus plenior*, particularly in searching for references to Christ, had to do with his respect for the meaning of the text as it was originally presented (to the extent that we can recover that meaning) and his awareness that *sensus plenior* has been used in the past in extreme ways, sometimes forcing texts to mean what we want them to mean, not what they might seem to mean in the whole context of revelation. (This practice is called *eisegesis*—“reading into” a text, different from *exegesis*—getting the meaning “out of” a text.) Consider the horrors forced on women in Europe in the Middle Ages and, later, in Salem, Massachusetts, by application in a contemporary context of the command in Exodus 22:17 (18): “You shall not let a woman who practices sorcery live” (older translations said “a witch”). This tendency toward inserting personal meaning into the biblical text is particularly noticeable these days when people try to link parts of the Book of Revelation to current events or predict the coming apocalypse. It is less noticeable, but perhaps just as smothering to the original meaning of texts, when Christians grab for single-verse “proof texts” to underpin some aspect or other of Christian doctrine. For instance, another teacher at Catholic University, at the same time that Father Murphy was teaching, explained to his students that a reference to the Trinity was “hidden” in the Book of Genesis: In the first creation narrative, he said, specifically in Genesis 1:1–3, you find God, the “breath” or “spirit” of God, and God’s word: therefore, Father, Son, and Spirit. The confirmation of this hidden reference, he explained with an attempt at magisterial authority, came from the fact that Genesis and the Gospel according to John open with the same words: “In the beginning . . . .”

### The Liturgy’s *Sensus Plenior*

The texts of the liturgy are rich with “wider meaning” applications of texts to Christ and the Church. In fact, some of our strongest liturgical images come from such applications. Consider the “O” antiphons at Advent evening prayer and the entrance antiphon for Mass on Christmas Day that conflates Isaiah 9:1, 5 and Luke 1:33: “Today a light will shine upon us, for the Lord is born for us/ and he will be called Wondrous God,/ Prince of peace, Father of future ages/ and his reign will be without end.” Or look at the text of the Easter Proclamation, which links Passover with the sacrifice of the “one true Lamb”:

- These, then, are the feasts of Passover, in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb, whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.
- This is the night, when once you led our forebears, Israel’s children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea. . . .
- This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.

These texts have shaped and enriched the liturgy for centuries, and we accept them almost without thinking, letting them form our understanding of the Christian mystery and even our approach to the texts of the Old Testament. But such a non-critical acceptance of these texts is precisely the problem that has vexed biblical scholars: It blinds us to the authentic original meaning of the texts and keeps us from inquiring how that original meaning has been reinterpreted and applied, for good or ill, in various situations. Hymnody is often a culprit in this. For example, the hymn “I Know that My Redeemer Lives,” a beloved part of the funeral liturgy, is a Christological *application* of a mistranslation of Job 19:25–27, which is really about Job’s yearning to confront God face-to-face while he is still alive, and not have a relative serving as his “vindicator” do it for him after his death (literally, “after my skin has been peeled off”). Consider also how many people think that the hymn “The King of Love My
Shepherd Is” is simply a metrical paraphrase of Psalm 23, when it is, in fact, a Christological application of the psalm that may disguise the wider meaning of the original text. Such naïveté about the way biblical texts are used and applied keeps us from learning, as our ancestors learned, to search for new meanings in God’s Word, new applications to our own culture and experience. In a sense, it misshapes our ability to do creative lectio divina and add our own understanding of these texts to the layers of meaning with which our ancestors painted those same texts.

More Context, More Dialogue, More Understanding

The French philosopher-theologian Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) is noted for his call to move from a naïve reading of classic texts, especially texts filled with metaphor—like Scripture and poetry—through the “desert” of critical study, in which, as Gershon D. Robinson puts it, we ask whether “what the text appears to say really does correspond with its true message,” to a “second naïveté” that embraces the meaning and truth of the text with new understanding and in a new context. So, for example, a biblical text once accepted as history, truthful at face value (e.g., the story of the Great Flood in Genesis), is examined critically and identified as a mythic metaphor for naming the consequences of human sinning in a dramatic way. Then, embraced again as a source of truth about human life, it becomes a story whose meaning we can apply to our own time, when what is best in humanity is in danger of being “drowned” in rampant consumerism or destroyed by the raging seas of constant wars and insurrections. Only that which is best in our shared humanity, as the story points out, will bring us through such times.

This same approach is what biblical scholars are encouraging—not that we end with a critical study of the biblical text but that we begin there and build on what we can discover about the text. We are not limited by the original context or the text’s original meaning, as Ricoeur points out, because once a text is written down, to some extent it “becomes a disembodied voice, detached from the author and the author’s situation.” It is, therefore, open to new interpretation—but in the case of biblical and other “classic” texts, that interpretation must always take into account the original meaning. Reading the text, then, or proclaiming it in the liturgical assembly, becomes a dialogue that involves the original intent of the author (so far as we can discern it), the context of this text within the narrative that is the Bible, its reception by a believing tradition that has used the text in various ways, and current hearers who receive the text as communicated in all these layers, with all this rich tradition of interpretation, and who then try to interpret it and apply it to today’s circumstances. It is a process filled with riches on which we can draw—but only if we identify the nature of those riches and their uses down the centuries. If we can, then we might become the kind of learners that Jesus described: “Every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Matthew 13:52).

Notes


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2 Dates and Locations

June 29–July 1 • Chicago, Illinois
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY. Overlooking Lake Michigan. The housing residence is air-conditioned with double occupancy rooms and shared bath; single occupancy available on a limited basis for a $75 supplement. Early arrival on June 28, based on availability, for a $75 supplement. The Lake Shore campus is about half an hour's drive from O'Hare International Airport (just over 12 miles) and about an hour from Chicago Midway International Airport (just over 21 miles). Website: www.luc.edu.

August 3–5 • Dubuque, Iowa
MOUNT LORETTO: SITE OF PROGRAM SESSIONS. The motherhouse of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the site of the Cantor Express sessions in Dubuque. Air-conditioned housing is available on-site in 12 single rooms with bath and in 4 two-bedroom suites with shared bath. Additional non-air-conditioned housing is available at a lower registration rate in single rooms with shared bath at the Shalom Retreat Center a few miles from Mount Loretto. Check the Shalom Retreat Center housing option on the registration form for this lower-cost option. (Note: If necessary, after the Mount Loretto rooms are full, participants will be assigned to the Shalom Center rooms at the lower rate. If you request housing at Mount Loretto but are assigned to the Shalom Center, your confirmation letter will reflect that change.) Transportation will be provided to and from the Retreat Center. The motherhouse is about half an hour’s drive from Dubuque Regional Airport (just over 12 miles). Website: www.dubuquepresentations.org. Shalom website: www.shalomretreats.org.

Faculty: Chicago

Joanne Werner
Director of liturgy and music, St. Michael Catholic Church, Bedford, Texas; former chair, NPM Board of Directors.

Joe Simmons
Co-director of music, The Sunday Mass on ABC Family; principal cantor, St. John the Baptist, New York City; author, clinician, recording and concert artist.

Faculty: Dubuque

Mary Lynn Pleczkowski
Editor, The Liturgical Singer; chair, NPM Steering Committee for Cantors.

Dan Girardot
Director of liturgy and music at St. Theresa Church, Austin, Texas.
27th Annual Choir Director Institute

June 25–29, 2012 • Cleveland, Ohio

Date and Location

June 25–29, 2012
Notre Dame College, South Euclid
Notre Dame College sits on forty-eight picturesque, wooded acres in the quiet suburban neighborhood of South Euclid, just twenty-five minutes from downtown Cleveland. All rooms are single occupancy with shared private bath. Early arrival on June 24, based on availability, for a $75 supplement. Website: www.notredamecollege.edu.

Faculty

Kathleen DeJardin
Director of music ministries at Georgetown’s Holy Trinity Church in Washington, DC.

Rob Glover
Director of music ministries, Church of St. Therese, Deephaven, Minnesota; composer.

David Philippart
Director of liturgy, St. Nicholas Parish, Evanston, Illinois; author, parish retreat director, liturgy clinician.

Rex Rund
Director of music and liturgy, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Carmel, Indiana.

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26th Annual Guitar and Ensemble Institute

June 25–29, 2012 • Erlanger, Kentucky

Date and Location

June 25–29, 2012
Marydale Retreat Center
Located in the rolling hills of northern Kentucky, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati; the Retreat Center is air-conditioned. Rooms are single-occupancy with shared bath; early arrival on June 24, based on availability, for $75 supplement. Marydale is just four miles from Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport.

Faculty

Bobby Fisher
Program Coordinator
Music director at St. Agnes Church, Fort Wright, Kentucky; musician, composer, actor, clinician, and author.

Steve Petrunak
Guitar
Director of music at St. Blase Parish, Sterling Heights, Michigan; composer, recording artist, and clinician.

Jaime Cortez
Guitar
Director of music at Holy Cross Catholic Church, Mesa, Arizona; composer, clinician, arranger, and performer.

Jeff McLemore
Bass
Performer on bass and oboe and as vocalist, deep into “old school” jazz guitar studies and performance.

Karen Kane
Liturgy
Director, Office of Worship, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Bonnie Faber
Voice
Vocal coach; director of music ministries, St. Matthew Catholic Church, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Ken Gilman
Obbligato
Music director at St. Michael and All Angels, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Stephen Lay
Keyboards
Director of music at Church of the Resurrection, Ellicott City, Maryland.

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TUITION includes group sessions, individual coaching, materials, and all meals as noted during the course of your institute.

CONFIRMATION AND CANCELLATION
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In the event that a program must be canceled due to low enrollment, that decision will be made at least three weeks prior to the scheduled starting date and registered participants will receive a full refund of fees paid to NPM. Since NPM cannot offer reimbursement of travel fees, we recommend that registrants book nonrefundable flights not more than 21 days before the institute begins.

ACCOMMODATIONS
Early arrival lodging offered on a space-available basis for a $75 supplement: Check box on registration form.

Institute participants are responsible for arranging their own transportation, including ground transportation from airports or train stations to the institute site. Participants in the Guitar and Ensemble Institute will be met and taken to Marydale. Details when you register.

Mail registration form with payment to:
NPM Institutes
PO Box 4207 • Silver Spring, MD 20914-4207

Fax—credit cards only—(240) 247-3001
Register online—credit cards only—at www.npm.org

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Choral Ritual Recitative

Introit for the Third Sunday of Advent.
Ken Macek and Paul A. Tate. SATB, congregation, handbells. GIA, part of collection Radiant Light: Introits for Advent and Christmas. G-7994, $3.25. In the interest of “singing the Mass,” not just singing “at Mass,” Ken Macek and Paul Tate have set the introits (entrance chants of the Roman Missal) for the Sundays of Advent and Christmas for use by congregation, with choral parts, handbells, and C instruments. The setting for the Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) incorporates the Latin antiphon “Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, gaudete” (“Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice!”) as a tuneful antiphon for the congregation. The choir then sings a verse, and all sing the antiphon again. Even if you don’t sing the proper introit normally, or even for the whole season, this could be a way to set off Gaudete Sunday and its joyful expectation. Use it as a prelude piece, or immediately before the usual entrance hymn/song, or when the priest reaches the chair. It only requires a few handbells, making it accessible for your choristers to ring, and not requiring a full handbell choir. This entire collection is worth exploring for all who are interested in “singing the Mass” and seeking accessible resources.

Your Words, Lord, Are Spirit and Life.
J. Michael Joncas. SATB, congregation, unaccompanied with rehearsal piano. World Library Publications, 001752-N-AS; click and print file requires WLP annual license. With his usual flair for setting psalmody for liturgical use, Michael Joncas has crafted an utterly simple yet prayerful setting of this common Psalm 19 for Ordinary Time. Intended to be sung a cappella, the antiphon is for SATB choir, with the rest of the assembly singing the soprano line. Verses are intended to be sung by a cantor over the choir singing on “ooh” or humming. Even at Masses without a choir, the choral parts could be played on the organ with a cantor and congregation alone. Joncas has taken the translation of the text from the Lectionary for Mass, making it eminently useful for the liturgy of the Word. This could also appropriately be
sung during Communion, emphasizing the connection between the sweetness of Sacrament and Word.

In Your Love for Us All. Arr. J. Michael Thompson. SATB choir a cappella. World Library Publications, 005305, $1.65. Thompson has been a leader in bringing the best of the Eastern liturgical music tradition to the Latin (Roman) Rite, and this work is no exception. This collection of chants for Holy Thursday is adapted from those sung by both Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in the homeland of the Rusyn people (divided between Slovakia and Ukraine). The chants in the collection are sung during the Washing of the Feet in the Byzantine liturgy, and they could similarly be used during the Mandatum ritual in the Roman Rite Mass of the Lord’s Supper. The music is scored for unaccompanied SATB choir in the typical Byzantine chant style, and Thompson gives detailed performance notes as to how to do the chant authentically. The first chant echoes the entrance antiphon for Holy Thursday (setting the tone for the whole Triduum). The second and third chants are intended for the foot washing ritual. The fourth chant references the disciples, after the Last Supper, going to the Mount of Olives to pray with Jesus, and would be a fitting antiphon to conclude the Communion Rite or to introduce the Solemn Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. A choir who is unfamiliar with this style of singing may struggle with the concept, but the use of these theologically rich texts may make working on a new mode of singing worth it to choisters of any skill level. Especially in communities where the foot washing ritual is extended and requires multiple pieces of music, these chants will make an excellent addition to the Holy Thursday repertoire.

Psalms for the Easter Season. Chrysagonus Waddell, OSO (1930–2008). SATB choir, cantor, congregation, keyboard. World Library Publications, 006213, $5.00. The Sunday psalter of Easter Time comes to life in these plaintive and accessible settings for choir, cantor, and the rest of the assembly. Waddell has set the lectionary texts for each of the Sundays of Easter (in all three years), including Ascension and Pentecost. The antiphons are simple and easy to sing for the whole assembly, while they are adorned with SATB choral singing. In addition to the antiphon provided in the Lectionary, Waddell has also set “Alleluia”—the common psalm antiphon for Easter Time—which works with the psalm verses as well. Using these psalms, especially only with the antiphon “Alleluia,” would be a way to unify the Sundays of Easter and emphasize their paschal character. The chant settings of the verses are nothing extraordinary, but they work fine to convey the scriptural text.

The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor. W. Clifford Petty. SAT choir, cantor, congregation, guitar, keyboard. World Library Publications, 001256, $1.25. While Psalm 34 ranks only slightly behind Psalm 23 as the most often-set psalm in recent years for Catholic liturgical use, Petty provides a fresh take, using the underused antiphon “The Lord hears the cry of the poor.” In his usual compositional fashion, the piano accompaniment is not for the faint of heart but worth it for the pianist skilled in playing in a gospel or jazz style. The choral writing features a baritone part, making it accessible for choirs with a low men-to-women ratio. The setting is too extended, in my opinion, to use for the liturgy of the Word (especially during Ordinary Time), but it would make a fine piece during the Communion procession. (The use of the antiphon connecting the cry of the poor—who we must serve—and our reception of Communion would be most appropriate.) Additionally, the text of the verses doesn’t always align well with the melody line; this is of little concern because the solo cantor for whom the verses are intended could always improvise and adapt to personal speech rhythms. While intended for accompaniment by guitar, the key of Eb with no capo chords provided will be a challenge for many beginning and intermediate players. In all, this piece merits consideration as a staple of your Communion repertoire.

A Litany of Love. Based on Canon in D, Johann Pachelbel, with text and arrangement by Tony Alonso. SAB, cantor, congregation, keyboard, flute, oboe, cello. GIA, G-7873, $1.90; instrumental parts, G-7873INST, $7.50. Alonso’s collection of music for the sacrament of marriage, Arise, My Love, from which this piece is taken, is a great resource for wedding liturgies. In this litany, Alonso adapts the oft-used Canon in D, adding four different kinds of texts—all utilizing basically the same melody—with simple responses for the assembly. A litany of married saints includes many of the saints and blessed who were married to each other; it could be used as a processional song, or a gathering song, or even to accompany a unity candle ritual. The second text option—a blessing of the couple—could be used somewhere during the liturgy. It doesn’t take the text of the nuptial or final blessing from the rite, but it could be inserted into the rite in various places. The third option—prayer of the faithful—would make an excellent setting for this liturgical element, with the simple response “hear our prayer” sung by the whole assembly after each invocation. It might be especially prayerful to use the litany of the married saints at the beginning of the liturgy and the prayer of the faithful text later in the rite. Finally, Alonso offers invitations of a table blessing, intended for use at the rehearsal dinner or reception. This piece is a creative offering for wedding liturgies, incorporating a familiar and popular piece of classical music. Flute, oboe, and cello parts (available separately) would serve to enhance the piece in whatever way it is used. This piece would require a strong, well-prepared cantor, and its usage (with the exception of the prayer of the faithful text) would largely be an addition to, rather than a proper execution of, the sacramental rite. Nonetheless, this innovative piece, along with the entire collection from which it comes, is worth your look.

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to the teacher’s surprise, class discussions of music commentary by theologians such as Augustine, Luther, Barth, and Bonhoeffer were understood as “music” not “theology.” The student’s first language was theology, but that language was unrecognized when it spoke about music; the music teacher’s first language was music, so he sometimes didn’t recognize its theological import. Each hoped that the other would recognize the value of an unfamiliar discipline and begin learning its new language.

Toward the close of the twentieth century, the door to another such cross-disciplinary collaboration opened as neurophysiologists began exploring ways the human mind understands and processes music. They moved beyond mere anecdotal testimony about the ways music seems to influence human emotions to publish valuable scientific evidence about the ways music actually affects the body and how the human brain understands sound. The commingled languages of science and music began to appear in popular articles and books about music, though the theological implications of this combined research have yet to be explored in any depth.

Beginning in 2002, a “Music and Theology Colloquium,” chaired by Jeremy Begbie, was convened in Ely, Cambridgeshire (UK), to explore the hoped-for cross-fertilization of theology and music suggested by the first paragraph of this review. Its goal was “to demonstrate the fruitfulness of theology for music, and the fruitfulness of music for theology, with a view to encouraging sustained engagements between musicians and theologians in the future” (Resonant Witness, page 4).

This cross-disciplinary principle has guided the formation of Resonant Witness; all but four of the essays in this book were developed from two residential meetings of this colloquium. Each of the essay writers is introduced by a generous paragraph on pages 464–470.

The writing expresses the grace and hospitality of the project’s goals. For example, care is often taken to attribute value to a variety of cultures, musical styles, roles, and the many life stages of those who participate in both theological and musical pursuits. There is a detailed, useful introduction to what “shapes and conditions” the use of the words “music” and “theology” in the essays of the book (pages 5–13), and a glossary of musical terms (pages 471–480) precedes the index (pages 481–497).

The seventeen essays in this book are varied, intriguing, surprising, amusing, and, above all, informative and challenging. Each of the four sections into which they have been grouped is introduced (pages. 13–24) in a manner that makes one want to begin reading immediately. The four sections are titled “Music and Cosmos,” “Music and Culture,” Music and Theology” and “Music and Worship.”

The excellence of this book extends from the quality of its scholarship to the editors’ ability to anticipate readers’ concerns. They state without apology, for example, that the writers “do not share a single theology.” “On the other hand,” they write, “it is fair to say we adopt as normative the broad perspective of Christian Trinitarian orthodoxy, grounded in Scripture and classically expressed in the church’s ecumenical creeds” (page 9). The refreshing variety of perspectives one encounters from essay to essay will nourish our “growing edge” when we choose to savor this book and all it offers.

Resonant Witness, at last, is the book that has been written to enable, in the words of its subtitle, “conversations between music and theology.” But John Witvliet, writing in the Afterword, frankly describes the reading of this book as “a humbling experience.” Because “it pushes all of us to the edges of our competency,” both theologians and musicians will be challenged by it to increase their competencies in the discipline of the other. He writes:

Most of us who read this book may well find our view of any given essay marred by our own astigmatisms: We will see each essay through one stronger disciplinary eye and one weaker one. Thus, for most of us, this book is an invitation to a challenging but deeply rewarding trajectory of learning. Most of us need to strengthen at least one disciplinary eye to help us achieve the kind of musical-theological binocular vision that offers so much promise for new insight (page 455).

Neither the seminarian nor the music teacher at the beginning of this discussion could imagine a reason to develop their weaker “disciplinary eye,” because neither even had known a world in which they had experienced the benefits of healthy “musical-theological binocular vision.” If only they had known the essays that form the rich treasure of Resonant Witness, perhaps a vision of the natural bridge that lies between their two disciplines could have given life to the impulse to explore...
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what mutual revelation one might offer to the other and then lead them to adventure in other cross-disciplinary pursuits, such as the one beginning to be offered by neurophysiology.

A resolute exploration of these essays will be generously rewarded as gradually we come to deeper and wider understandings of music as a resonant witness to theology, “bearing testimony to the richness and implications of the Christian gospel through a range of resonances with it” (page 11).

Carol Doran

The Complete Psalms: The Book of Prayer Songs in a New Translation


Seldom does a new translation of any Scripture really open wide vistas of fresh understanding and insight. This edition of the Book of Psalms is a welcome exception! The translator, Pamela Greenberg, is a former rabbinic student who has taken advantage of her knowledge of Hebrew. In the introduction she tells us that she turned to the psalms at a difficult time in her life and found it true that the psalms speak to our humanity in all of its variety of life experiences. Her commentary reflects the June 22, 2011, catechesis of Pope Benedict XVI. From this base we have common ground for shared prayer.

In this translation there is a welcome emphasis on the awe and wonder that pondering God inspires. The very first verse that caught my eye when I opened this volume was Psalm 147:2. “How good it is to sing out to the Creator—/ because among the world’s pleasures, praise is the Lord.” On a whim I paged through the entire volume, noting several of them. Some of them make a veritable litany. For example: Source of Help, Source of Trust, Source of Eternal Life, Source of My Salvation, and Source of Compassion. Other titles address God as Strength, Power, Protection, Holiness, Light, Creator, and other divine attributes.

Praying this translation of the psalms one comes upon words or phrases that catch one by surprise. In Psalm 23, for instance, we are accustomed to saying that God anoints our head with oil. Instead of “anoint” Greenberg uses the word “drench.” The kings of Israel were “drenched” with oil. Pagan athletes were “drenched” with oil. In the early Church, catechumens were “drenched” with oil.

That image is a far cry from “the little dab will do you” that often serves as anointing today. Such word usage opens depths of fresh appreciation.

Feeling alone or abandoned is a common experience. In The Revised Grail Psalter (GIA), Psalm 31:13 is translated this way: “I am forgotten, like someone dead,/ and have become like a broken vessel.” Greenberg translates the same verse this way: “I have become invisible as the dead-hearted,/ like a lost vessel no one bothers to look for.” Yes, the Psalmist understands.

From my home on Lake Superior, I have the vastness of the universe in my view. Hence I easily relate to titles for the Holy One such as “Arranger of the Heavenly Spheres” and to those expressions which elicit hope and trust.

Greenberg’s introduction and Susan Heschel’s foreword are both clear and perceptive and could readily be used as introductory reading for a course on the psalms. One need not be a theologian or Scripture scholar to absorb the wealth they offer.

Here and there are a few passages which do not measure up to the poetry of such translations as The Jerusalem Bible. However, a welcome change is the lack of the word “not” at the end of so many lines, as in The New American Bible. If there is one drawback in this translation, it is the lack of numbering the verses, partly explained by Greenberg’s desire to add clarifying expression at times. However one can easily find the verse numbers by a comparison with another translation.

The most important aspect of The Complete Psalms is how easily praise rises from the heart of the reader. This translation is ready-made for lectio divina. Finally, the friends to whom I have given The Complete Psalms as a gift are unanimous in their appreciation.

Regis Walling

The Eucharistic Prayer: A Users Guide


Written from the “pew,” The Eucharistic Prayer has proved a fine study for lay people without background in liturgical things. The reviewer discovered this with his parish liturgy committee: Meetings always begin with studying something to build up knowledge among the lay members. The committee, working its way through The Eucharistic Prayer, found the concepts both within their grasp and surprising. It is especially enlightening for lay people to discover that the Eucharistic Prayer is not exclusively that of the priest, but all assembled have a part. This makes Chapter Two, “Who Prays the Eucharistic Prayer? An Extraordinary Answer,” a highlight of the book.

The chapter begins with Christ the Priest, and then carefully shows the role of the ordained, “In Persona Christi Capitis” (page 13). Once these concepts are secure, Hudock points out the obvious: The Eucharistic Prayer presumes an assembly. Using liturgical texts from tradition, he develops how the assembly is understood to be offering the “sacrifice of praise along with the priest.” Documents follow—Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, General Instruction of the Roman Missal, and Catechism of the
union with the Father. Our entry into the Eucharistic Prayer, then, relates us to God as daughters and sons, part of God’s “children,” the “family of God.” It is a sharp contrast to all that trains us “to see one another as opponents, competitors, rivals, and takers” (page 150).

Chapters are very short, and the language is simple, non-technical. Yet there are numerous footnotes. One realizes that Hudock has distilled the finest theological research on the Eucharistic Prayer and made it available to the average person who wants to know more. A glossary, though, would have been helpful.

James Challancin

About Reviewers

Rev. James Challancin is pastor of St. Joseph Church in Ishpeming, Michigan.

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Publishers

Bloomsbury—see Macmillan.

GIA Publications, 7404 S. Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638. (800) 442-1358; web: www.giamusic.com.

Liturgical Press, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. (800) 858-5450; web: www.litpress.org.


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Professional Concerns

By Joe Balistreri

Social Media and Pastoral Musicians

Remember those science fiction/science fantasy books, movies, and television shows of the 1950s? Writers and actors described a coming millennium filled with flying cars, colonies on other planets, and nuclear-powered wonders. Now, a good number of years into that millennium, we can safely say that advances in science and industry have revolutionized our lives quite differently than expected. With smart phones, teleconferencing, and rapid transit, the world in 2012 is an extremely well-networked place, in which people (and machines) communicate with speed and ease in ways unimaginated just decades ago. Increasingly, social media facilitates this communication. Individuals, businesses, and even parishes use social media to promote themselves and communicate quickly and, sometimes, poignantly with a network of interested persons. Pastoral musicians, whose vocation offers people abundant ways to connect to and through music in Jesus Christ, can benefit greatly from the use of social media, especially Facebook and LinkedIn.

Facebook™, founded in 2004 at Harvard, is arguably the leader of all social media sites. With web traffic rankings consistently in the top five¹ and a global membership of 840 million², Facebook alone has significantly networked the world and changed how people communicate. Facebook allows free, easy sharing of basic personal and professional information as well as more detailed information, such as photos, status updates, and romantic connections. Users can send each other messages, comment on each other’s photos, follow the latest status updates of friends, and chat “live.”

There are three basic types of Facebook presence available: the profile, the page, and the group.

A Facebook profile is, essentially, a dynamic, multimedia entry in a directory. Each profile is a template for personal information and a place for people to post comments, links, notes, pictures, and videos. The owner of a Facebook profile manages the content on the profile by filling in personal information on the template, such as birthday, education, occupation, residence, and other facts. Most of this information is kept private, open only to your chosen network of friends. Once the basic profile is established, other Facebook users can search for the profile using the owner’s name. When people find the person they are looking for, they can request to be “Facebook friends.” This means that the two parties will be able to share more content with each other and see more personal information, pictures, and comments. Each user has a “news feed” in which updates and postings on friends’ profiles are summarized in a dynamic list. It’s worth noting here that Facebook profile privacy settings are extremely comprehensive: One can delineate not only what is shared with friends or the public, one can separate friends into groups, and choose what specific types of content are shared with each group. For a pastoral musician, a personal Facebook profile is a great way to get in touch with colleagues, reconnect with classmates from past years, and keep up with friends. It is also the essential gateway to having a page or a group.

A Facebook page works differently from a profile; it functions as a public face for an organization or a person. The content on the page is accessible to the public. A variety of content templates exist, including artist promotion and business promotion. Users interact with a page freely, and, if they connect with the content, they can choose to “like” the page. This means that, by default, updates to the content of the page will appear in the “news feed” of users who “like” the page. This provides ample opportunity for page owners to promote their activities. In fact, one can promote the page with paid advertising in “news feeds” and on users’ profiles. A page would be the ideal place for a pastoral musician to promote a parish, a concert series, or a music ministry program. (The Director of Music Ministries Division, NPM itself, the NPM Cantor Section, the NPM Youth Section, and several chapters have pages on Facebook.)

The Facebook group would be ideal for members of a parish choir or for a vicariate group of pastoral musicians. The group brings Facebook users together on a single page, where they can discuss and interact with content relating to the group. There are two types of group: open and closed. A closed group requires that a member of the group invites another user to join. Also, a user can search for a group and request membership. The group then has strict control of information shared on its site. A group would be an excellent place for a limited number of pastoral musicians to discuss concerns and ideas, to share successes and failures, and to help one another in their ministries.

In the next installment of this column, I’ll discuss LinkedIn™ and some of the professional concerns about using social media.

Notes

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Los salmos que nos cantan

Desde los primeros días del Cristianismo, los salmos y cánticos bíblicos han sido parte de nuestro culto. En un principio, los primeros cristianos cantaban algunos salmos o ciertos versos de determinados salmos. Pero, gradualmente, a medida que surgía la liturgia que tomamos prestada de la sinagoga y las casas judías, incorporamos más y más textos cantados de la Biblia, lo cual comprendió la mayor parte del Libro de los Salmos y algunos de los cánticos (cantos) de los libros de varios profetas y de las Escrituras del Nuevo Testamento, particularmente de San Lucas, San Pablo y el Libro de la Revelación. Hoy en día, el culto católico está lleno de salmos y de partes de salmos. En nuestra celebración de la Misa se incluyen salmos y versos de los salmos (o, a menudo, cantos basados en los salmos) para cuatro procesiones, a saber, la procesión de la entrada, la procesión con el Libro de los Evangelios, la procesión con las ofrendas y la procesión de la Comunión. Además, cantamos un salmo o cántico entre las lecturas para responder a la Palabra de Dios con la propia Palabra de Dios.

La oración diaria de la Iglesia —la liturgia de las horas— consta principalmente de estos textos de cantos bíblicos (unas veces cantados y otras recitados) que nos preparan para el día y nos recuerdan que Dios está siempre presente (“¡Despierta, alma mía!” dice el Salmo 56) y, por la noche, en palabras de San Basilio el Grande, nos ayudan a “dar gracias por lo que se nos ha dado o por lo que hemos hecho bien durante el día”.

Todos los demás ritos de la Iglesia —desde el bautismo hasta la liturgia funeraria— están llenos de salmos. Los salmos para estos ritos que se incluyen en los libros de rituales se han escogido con cuidado para que reflejen y revelen el significado de cada una de las ceremonias y lo que representa para nosotros la participación en ellas. Los diversos salmos incluidos en los ritos de iniciación (el bautismo, la confirmación y la primera participación) son presentados con sabiduría ante Dios; aquí se encuentran expresiones de gozo y dolor, angustia y esperanza, temor y ansiedad” (exhortación apostólica postinodal, Verbum Domini, 24).

Pero los salmos hacen mucho más que eso. No solo nos dan palabras para colocar nuestras experiencias “ante Dios”, sino que nos ayudan a determinar la forma de entender y responder a esas experiencias. Al rezar con estos textos cantados, al permitir que se conviertan en una fuente de reflexión sobre la vida y su significado, nos damos cuenta de que se alojan en nuestro corazón y nos dan palabras para colocar nuestras experiencias y responder a esas experiencias. Al rezar con estos textos cantados, al permitir que se conviertan en una fuente de reflexión sobre la vida y su significado, nos damos cuenta de que se alojan en nuestro corazón y nos dan palabras para colocar nuestras experiencias y responder a esas experiencias. Al rezar con estos textos cantados, al permitir que se conviertan en una fuente de reflexión sobre la vida y su significado, nos damos cuenta de que se alojan en nuestro corazón y nos dan palabras para colocar nuestras experiencias y responder a esas experiencias. Al rezar con estos textos cantados, al permitir que se conviertan en una fuente de reflexión sobre la vida y su significado, nos damos cuenta de que se alojan en nuestro corazón y nos dan palabras para colocar nuestras experiencias y responder a esas experiencias. Al rezar con estos textos cantados, al permitir que se conviertan en una fuente de reflexión sobre la vida y su significado, nos damos cuenta de que se alojan en nuestro corazón y nos dan palabras para colocar nuestras experiencias y responder a esas experiencias.
The Psalms That Sing Us

Since the early days of Christianity, the biblical psalms and canticles have been part of our worship. At first, early Christians sang just a few psalms or even just a few verses of selected psalms. But gradually, as the liturgy that we borrowed from the Jewish synagogue and Jewish homes developed, we incorporated more and more song texts from the Bible, using most of the Book of Psalms and some of the canticles (songs) from the books of various prophets and from the New Testament Scriptures—especially from Luke, Paul, and the Book of Revelation.

Today, Catholic worship is full of psalms and parts of psalms. Our celebration of Mass uses psalms and psalm verses (or, often, songs based on the psalms) for four processions—entrance, procession with the Gospel Book, procession with offerings, and the Communion procession. And we sing a psalm or canticle between the readings as a way to respond to the Word of God with the Word of God.

The Church’s daily prayer—the liturgy of the hours—consists primarily of these biblical song texts (sometimes chanted, sometimes recited) that prepare us for the day, reminding us that God is always present (“Awake, my soul!” says Psalm 57), and in the evening help us, in the words of St. Basil the Great, to “give thanks for what has been given us, or what we have done well, during the day.”

All the other rites of the Church—from baptism through the funeral liturgy—are full of psalms. The psalms for these rites that are included in the ritual books have been chosen carefully so that they might reflect and open up what the individual ceremonies mean and what our participation in them does for us. The various psalms used in the initiation rites (baptism, confirmation, and the first full sharing in the Eucharist) remind us that we don’t just join the Church; we are called to belong to a “blessed . . . people the Lord has chosen to be his own” (refrain for Psalm 33), a people who enter into Christ’s Paschal Mystery and find there “mercy and the fullness of redemption” (refrain for Psalm 130).

In marriage, a Christian couple finds God to be their “help and shield” (Psalm 33), “close to all who call him” (Psalm 145), so they feel they can trust in the Lord (Psalm 112) as they seek to imitate for each other God’s qualities as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, rich in mercy, and just (Psalm 103). Candidates for priesthood and the vowed life of a religious sing similar psalms of trust, even as they pray that they may have the clean hands and pure heart required of those who would “climb the mountain of the Lord” and “stand in his holy place” (Psalm 24).

The twenty-five psalms designated for use in the various funeral rites sing of confidence in God even at the time of death, but they also help us to express deep pain and sorrow, asking God to “relieve the anguish of my heart” (Psalm 25). They remind us all, as we gather at the grave, that all the faithful may sing this song: “I will walk in the presence of the Lord/ in the land of the living” (Psalm 116) because God redeems our lives from the grave (Psalm 103).

Shaped by Psalms

Pope Benedict XVI has recently described the role of the psalms this way: God gives us the psalms and canticles so that we have “words to speak to him, to place our lives before him, and thus to make life itself a path to God. In the psalms we find expressed every possible human feeling set masterfully in the sight of God; joy and pain, distress and hope, fear and trepidation: here all find expression” (post-synodal exhortation Verbum Domini, 24).

But the psalms do far more than that. Not only do they give us words to place our experiences “in the sight of God,” they help us shape how we understand and respond to those experiences. As we pray these song texts, as we allow them to become a source for reflection on life and its meaning, we find them making a home in our heart, and we discover ourselves drawing on the language of the psalms to understand what’s happening to us and in our world. They help us to hear; they help us to know how to say what ought to be said. At its heart, the Christian life is marked by an encounter with Jesus Christ—an encounter that deepens, if we allow it, through the Holy Spirit’s action in every aspect of our lives. In the psalms, God gives us a voice that resonates with the myriad experiences that arise and evoke in us hope, lament, thanksgiving, and praise. We can find in these songs a wisdom that helps us, as the Holy Father said, “make life itself a path to God.”
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