

SPECIAL EDITION

# PASTORAL MUSIC

## AT THE (DIGITAL) BANQUET OF THE LORD

### *Part One: A Primer on Livestreamed Mass*

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By: *Ricky Manalo, CSP*

The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly imposed a new landscape for ministry, worship, communication, and encounters within our families, friends, parish communities, and any social occasion. Since March of 2020, when virus cases began rising and pandemic protection measures began, an overwhelming majority of Roman Catholic dioceses initiated livestreamed or televised Masses to protect parishioners from further infection.

As the pandemic progressed, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) coordinated a national survey of parishes throughout the United States that indicated the following patterns in regard to media transmission of the Mass:

- 70% of the dioceses who participated in the survey acknowledged that most of their parishes provided media access to Sunday Mass;
- 41% provided media access to daily Mass;
- 95% of livestream parishes used Facebook as a media platform and 79% used YouTube.

Admittedly, some efforts are better than others, but any parish that has attempted to offer liturgical

ministry throughout these pandemic months is to be commended. That said, livestreamed Mass is an uncharted endeavor for many, so it is also an opportunity for everyone to learn more about what pastoral practices can engage parishioners online, especially when it is a new experience.

The following are my reflections on this growing worship practice. Part One (below) offers the who, what, when, where, and why of Livestreamed Mass. Part Two (which will be published in the January 2021 issue of *Pastoral Musician*) will provide practical and pastoral suggestions with the goal of better engaging online participants who regularly worship through this medium. While both of these articles focus on Livestreamed Mass during the present pandemic context, much of what I suggest should be useful and relevant well after the pandemic subsides for reasons that I specify below. While livestreamed Masses are not intended to replace our regular Sunday gatherings in churches, they remain a valuable form of connecting, particularly to our homebound members, ministerial outreach, and evangelization.

## What is Livestreamed Mass?

A livestreamed Mass is the simultaneous video or audio broadcasting of a Mass through the television or Internet allowing participants to watch, listen and worship in real time from another location. Two primary models have emerged amid a variety of approaches: “liturgy-as-is” and “intentional interactive liturgy.” In the “liturgy-as-is” model, one or two stationary cameras offer a relatively unchanged view of a worship space and liturgical ministers do not acknowledge the virtual presence of online worshippers, make eye-contact with the camera, or offer any assistance to encourage participation.

In an “intentional interactive liturgy,” the liturgical ministers acknowledge the presence of online worshippers and offer support for all to participate better. This model provides a variety of ways to help viewers engage, such as easily accessible down-loadable worship aids, music or text on the screen, ministers looking directly at the camera to make “eye contact” with online worshippers, an option to write comments during the broadcast, and online “hosts” within the comments section to help guide the worship.

## Should You Livestream Mass?

Even before the pandemic, some parishes and dioceses regularly provided livestreamed Masses as a form of outreach to homebound members, but most parishes did not. A friend shared with me how much she appreciated the increased quantity and quality of livestreamed worship services since the pandemic began. Before, she had felt neglected and invisible, but once “everyone became homebound,” she felt more connected, even though she has not been able to be physically present at her church for several years.

An increased online presence has also reconnected parishes with parishioners who have moved out-of-state and led to surprising occasions for outreach and evangelization. Livestreamed Masses and interactive websites that offer more than digital information, as well as, Liturgy of the Hours, quality preaching, and diverse music have attracted new “online parishioners” who live beyond diocesan boundaries to experience

a particular parish. Collectively, online worship has redefined “destination parishes,” provided unexpected flexibility for work schedules, relief for parents struggling with young children and infants, and invited a myriad of people to worship in new ways.

Although online worshippers participate and find meaning in virtual services, viewing the Mass on a computer or a TV does not present the same level of full, conscious, and active participation that the Second Vatican Council envisioned. Yet these digital venues offer a form of pastoral care, however limited, for those who cannot gather in physical close proximity to share in the Body of Christ as the Body of Christ.

A notable imbalance between online and on-site is due to how some camera operators can inadvertently center around the role of the priest and leave out the active role of the laity. The camera might only show the presiding priest receive communion, even if a handful of communicants are present, or film a statue or a written prayer as an off-camera person reads a “Prayer of Spiritual Communion” for everyone to share.

Finally, some might fear livestreamed Masses as a possible threat to church authority or doctrine. There are no codified regulations for how to participate and to pray at home, but parishes would do well to offer guidance for how parishioners can set up home prayer areas, accompanying meditation items, such as a cross, candle, or Bible, and encourage prayer throughout the week, rather than only for livestreamed Mass. As with so many efforts during the pandemic, everyone is on a learning curve, but if people are tuning in, we can presume they have the best intentions of their faith and church at heart.

*“Liturgy is not just ritual,  
not just a cult, not just  
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## Encountering God through Livestreamed Mass

As the late great theologian Fr. Robert Taft, SJ reminded us, the liturgy is “[g]iven to us by God and received by us . . .” In the liturgy, the entire assembly, which includes the presider, “comes together” and responds in faith to God. In short, God initiates and we, in turn, respond. Taft notes: “liturgy is not just ritual, not just a cult, not just the worship we offer God. It is first of all God’s coming to us in Christ.”

This balance between God’s initiation and our response has implications for how liturgical ministers serve “in front of the camera” and how those “at home” encounter God via social media or television. Even though the assembly is distant from a church building, any act of worship is first and foremost directed toward God. At the other end, liturgical ministers are not actors in a television show and despite a strong reliance on media tools and production skills, the goal of Mass is not entertainment. Although liturgical action involves culturally appropriate and performative skills, the liturgy will not become a television show if everyone involved stays focused on the reason for their worship. In liturgy the faithful are brought together for an encounter between the Triune God, ourselves, and other members of the Body of Christ. Liturgical ministers, whether online or in-person, are not to be entertainers, but are always to lead the people of God towards a communal response to God’s invitation that ultimately leads to their sanctification and the glorification of God.

## The Locations of Livestreamed Mass

*Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*, the bishop’s guiding document for building and renovating churches tells us that, “The church is the proper place for the liturgical prayer of the parish community.” The same holds true for livestreamed Mass, although the technical needs for livestreaming Masses need to be specified. The worship space should be equipped with the proper technology and a strong Wi-Fi signal. The acoustics and sound equipment also need to be configured, so that reverberations do not distort spoken or sung word and eliminate the presence of any distracting background noises.

*“... everyone is connected to the one shared celebration of the liturgy.”*

I first appreciated worship space as a youth at Midnight Mass. Our family would arrive early to avoid sitting in the extended section of the parish hall, where plastic chairs were set out for overflow crowds. I remember occasionally sitting there and feeling distant from the sanctuary. It was harder to pay attention. I know many parishes set up these sorts of accommodations on a regular basis, when large crowds are expected. Others set out extra seats and a large television in nearby separate buildings. In the Philippines, television sets are placed outside the front entrance of churches, since most churches are filled to capacity. In many ways, livestreamed Mass is an extension of these practices; in many other ways, it is not the same worshipful experience. Yet a consistent dynamic in these overflow scenarios is that while spatial variations may differ, everyone is connected to the one shared celebration of the liturgy. Online worshipers no doubt feel the difference between what is taking place in front of the camera and their experience at home. But given the pandemic context, many remain appreciative that all of us are somehow worshipping together.

## Livestreamed Mass and Liturgical Time

Throughout the pandemic and struggles as to how to worship, the story of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection continues to unfold in a three-fold anamnestic remembering that recalls history, celebrates the current reality, and looks forward to the fullness of God’s reign. Each time we gather in worship, all of these realities are present during the “now” of our real-time prayer. Liturgical professor, Andrew Ciferni, O. Praem. once asked his students the most important words they could ever speak or sing during the liturgy. A number responded “Amen, Alleluia, God, or Jesus” until Fr. Ciferni eventually offered his thought, which was (paraphrased), “Any word or term that denotes the ‘now-ness’ of the liturgy.” He went on to give some examples with the Latin words *hodie*, the Latin for “today,” and *nunc*, meaning “now.”

Michael D. Whalen expands on this understanding of liturgical time and the progression of the liturgical year:

On the one hand, the liturgical year is marked by a certain incarnational quality rooted in the theological principle of mediation. The Christian community takes seriously the affirmation that the disclosure of God is a possibility even now. This affirmation is enshrined in many of the liturgical texts. For example, the opening antiphon for the vigil Mass of Christmas is: “Today you will know that the Lord is coming to save us, and in the morning you will see his glory.” This antiphon is addressed to the gathered assembly. This “now-ness” is also brought out beautifully in the Easter proclamation [the Exultet] through the repeated use of the phrase, “This is the night...”

An emerging tension is broadcasting of a liturgical event that allow participation in real time, as well-meaning ministers include previously recorded experiences of worship sliced in to augment the current livestream reality. For example, I have experienced recorded music videos inserted into the opening song or responsorial psalm, rather than livestreaming parish musicians in real-time. While the goal is to improve the liturgy during the pandemic limits of music ministers gathering together, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ guidelines on liturgical music, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship (STL)* are clear in their reservation on the use of recorded music during Mass:

93. Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy.

Is a pre-recorded music video during a livestreamed Mass the equivalent of a recorded song during Sunday Mass? Once I encountered a post-communion song for a livestreamed Mass broadcast on Easter Sunday 2020 that included a recorded video of the choir from the previous year’s celebration. When I shared this experience, a friend responded: “They’ve already taken away the worship space from us, now they’re taking away our time.” My friend succinctly expressed the frustration of being snatched away from the “now/present-ness” of liturgical time, after having been physically removed from the church building site.

I also have heard the voices of liturgical musicians who expressed a newfound enthusiasm during the production of these videos as it allowed them to share their gifts without the danger of contamination.

For online worshippers, does the experience of praying alongside recorded videos point to the nowness of liturgical time that Ciferni and Whalen articulated? What exactly is the temporal framework that defines embodied ritual immediacy (liturgy’s “now-ness”) in a world of digital media that seemingly expands and contracts the temporal boundaries of ritual performance? Related to this are the practices of the younger generations of worshipers who are being brought up in a more readily and instantly accessible (read: “now”) digital environment. Does their approach to a “digitalized now” differ from the “analog now” of a previous generation and, if so, how? Are those in the younger generation able to live within the temporal framework of a globalized world that seemingly blurs the lines and stretches the boundaries between past, present, and future, and still experience pre-recorded videos as a now event ... but through their own generational worldview and ritual (and increasingly digitalized) sensibilities? I offer no answers to these questions for now, but instead, propose that such questions need to be addressed today, if the practice of livestreamed Mass continues.

We are a pilgrim people on a path that is ever unfolding. This reality holds true whenever and wherever we gather for worship; in underground catacombs as the persecuted Christians of old or unexpectedly around computers in our homes or through iPhones and other portable devices. Our ongoing challenge is to embrace the “now” of every moment, however difficult or different that reality might be from one generation to the next. In doing so, we embrace the presence of God and one another as the Body of Christ, regardless of any social distance.



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### *Part Two: Principal Practices for Livestreamed Masses*

By: *Ricky Manalo, CSP*

As 2020 Lent began, the early stages of the COVID-19 virus were entering the United States. By Palm Sunday, a world-wide pandemic had been declared, most churches were closed, and parishes were in the throes of figuring out how to celebrate Triduum online. During the ensuing weeks, I participated in dozens of livestreamed Masses and came to collect a list of what I believe can serve as guiding principles when offering livestreamed Masses. These observations will most likely continue to evolve through experience and time, but meanwhile my hope is to support pastoral leaders as they encourage the active participation of online worshipers now, during this time of pandemic, and in the future.<sup>1</sup>

As with all pastoral decisions, the quality of a livestreamed Mass is dependent upon the unique makeup of the parish and its resources. Here are some of the dynamics I found make a difference:

- The number and quality of media and technological tools used during the livestreamed Mass broadcast and on the parish website.
- The familiarity of parish leaders with media skills and the expertise of those they choose or hire to assist the parish with media, web presence, and livestreamed Masses.
- How the camera portrays the integration of diverse cultures.
- How being on camera influences the centrality of the presider's leadership, the proclamation of the scriptures, the presence of the laity, and diverse cultures.
- The liturgical and theological background of the camera operator, those who plan the livestreamed liturgies, and those who make primary media decisions.
- The capacity of parishioners to access livestreamed liturgies in their homes via television or other electronic devices.
- Wi-Fi strength or the varying existence of internet access in urban and rural areas.

- The technological equipment used by worshipers in their homes and their ability to operate various devices, such as smart phones, iPads, and computers.
- Pastoral resources to reach out to parishioners beyond livestreamed Masses, to encourage participation in parish life and growth in faith and service.

Not every recommendation is possible for every parish and the whole endeavor of livestreaming requires an understanding and experience with recording and producing equipment, online platforms, technology, and software needed. As a result, it is important to know what the parish can and cannot do with their current resources, so they can explore how to acquire appropriate resources, collaborate with another parish to provide online worship if necessary, and plan for how to meet off-site worship needs.

Another concern is the gaze of the presider and that of all liturgical ministers who will be viewed on camera by the online assembly. Whether present on-site or online, the engagement of the presider and liturgical ministers with the assembly through the camera lens at appropriate times can make all the difference, so it is important that worshipers feel “seen” wherever they are participating.

I experienced a variety of online parish gatherings in my initial exploring of livestreamed Masses and discovered two main models of practice; one a more intentional “interactive model” and the other a more “liturgy-as-is model.” I found the interactive model to be more engaging, although any effort is of course helpful during a time when it is not possible to physically gather in person to pray as a community.

## How to Begin Livestreaming Masses

As with any gathering, welcomes and invitations are essential to ensure participants know how to tune in and worship online. Parishes should do everything they can to provide clear information on their website and connect in a variety of ways, so as many people are included as possible, even if they are not accustomed to online communication. It is good to continue this guidance throughout the worship experience, since the process may be new to many and newcomers to technology might not know what to expect.

Prior to the beginning of the Mass, a welcome can be provided on the website by the pastor or another parish leader at least thirty minutes beforehand with instructions for how “at-home worshipers” can access the livestreamed Mass. A link on the website might read: “St. Martha Mass Livestream.” After clicking on the link, a listing of the livestreamed Masses with times can be offered. When the “10 a.m.” link appears and is clicked, the livestreamed view of the worship area appears and instrumental music can already be playing, so participants know they are in the right place, along with an identifying header, that includes the date, Mass time, and link for a downloadable worship aid.

As the prelude music is playing, the camera can show different views of the church, to provide comfort to parishioners who miss being there and offer newcomers a larger sense of the parish community’s home. If a camera person is not available to show varying views, a slide show can present a welcome page and illustrations of the liturgical season, especially if it is a particular Sunday, Feast, or Solemnity. Sacred art that is part of the church building, views of the parish grounds, and images illuminating the scriptures of the day, and live video of parishioners entering the church and settling in their pews, if there are onsite worshipers, can also be included.

## Greeting, Welcome, and Instructions

Parishes may have particular ways they begin their worship, such as greeting everyone, or new patterns can be introduced to help everyone feel at home and part of the community. About ten minutes prior to Mass, a parish lay leader can look directly into the camera and welcome everyone in these or similar words:

“Good morning, brothers and sisters. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m here to welcome you to St. Martha’s Catholic Church and our gathering today. Thank you for praying with us and we will begin our celebration in about ten minutes. We especially welcome all those joining us online from our community, across the country, and throughout the world. We invite you to connect with one another in the discussion comment box on your screen and offer your greetings. Our online hospitality minister will also be present throughout the Mass to guide participation in the comments.”

In some livestreamed Masses, smaller windows of worship participants appear on the screen at different times “in their homes” throughout the liturgy and may be introduced by name and their ministry, such as the presider, deacon, musicians, cantor, and technology support people. The camera may pan out to the assembly if they are present in the church and show online participants in on screen view boxes. Further instruction for participation can also be offered:

“If you have not yet done so, please download the worship aid by clicking right below this screen. If you cannot download or access this resource, contact our parish and we’ll make sure to mail you one as soon as they become available. If you do not wish to view the discussion and comments area, you can click on the top-right area of your screen. You may also consider expanding the video screen to full size by clicking on the partial square near the bottom of your view. If you would like help with any of this, contact the parish office for a thirty-minute in person tutorial, virtual conference call, or guiding video.

“We also invite you to prepare a space in your home to serve as your worship area, where you can light a candle, lay out a prayer cloth or table runner to match the liturgical church color, and open a bible to one of the readings for today as listed on our website and here in the discussion box.”

“We hope you will participate while at home and we invite you to stand and sit, pray and sing as much as possible throughout the liturgy and as indicated by our online hospitality minister in the discussion box. Let us now join in a moment of silence (or musical meditation music) as we begin our worship.”

## The Introductory Rites

### Entrance Rite

As the worship is about to begin, the instrumental music stops and if a separate worship aid is not being used by the participants, the lyrics to the entrance song, without the notes, can appear on screen. My experience finds it easier for online worshipers to sing if they see the words, but not the musical notes, which can create a visual distraction. Fewer elements on the screen can also free worshipers to view the ritual action while singing. The cantor who leads the singing should maintain eye contact with the camera lens whenever possible.

*“A well-prepared presider understands how the rhythm and pace of their words and action and the optimal use of the acoustics and sound system all make a difference.”*

### The Presider Prayers and Leadership

A well-prepared presider understands how the rhythm and pace of their words and action and the optimal use of the acoustics and sound system all make a difference. The degree and frequency of eye contact with the on-site and online assembly have no fixed rules. Some presiders choose to look upward during particular prayers, such as, “You are indeed Holy, O Lord,” and some choose to look to those gathered or towards the camera to the online assembly during other ritual moments, “The Lord be with you.” This could require new presider habits during the liturgy, but it is well worth the effort to engage more fully with everyone, whether in person or online.

## The Liturgy of the Word

### Scripture Readings

In many parishes and dioceses, lectors meet for spiritual formation and to learn more about the practical aspects of their ministry. These gatherings can help readers delve deeper into the scriptures, as well as learn similar skills needed by presiders with regard to pacing, enunciation, posture, and the use of acoustics and the sound system. There is a difference between proclaiming the Word to the assembly, rather than simply reading it, with no inflection. With some worshipers being present in church and others online, lectors will also need to become comfortable with looking into the camera, as well as at the assembly.

*“The inherent grace is that the opportunity for online engagement does not need to end when everyone is able to safely gather again.”*

If it is possible for the church to be accessible outside of Mass, parishes can encourage lectors to practice proclaiming from the ambo, while looking to where the camera lens would be positioned and also at the pews. It is especially helpful if parishes can use more than one camera during their livestream, with one camera directly in front of the ambo and another in the center of the worship area. If there is only one camera, consider the latter option. In this way, the lectors can look at that camera and simultaneously engage both the online assembly and those in the church.

Although it is preferable for the assembly to listen to the readings, without text, some parishes opt to display the scriptures on the screen, possibly because the sound system does not work well enough. We also should not assume that every sound system used by online worshipers work well. Another option is to display the scripture text in the discussion box, rather than the screen, but be sure to alert worshipers at home before Mass begins, so they can make use of that visual support if desired. After each of the readings, the camera can pan out to any onsite assembly as they respond, “Thanks be to God.”

### **Responsorial Psalm and Gospel Acclamation**

During the responsorial psalm, the camera may focus in front of the cantor for the first refrain and the following verses. For all other refrains, the camera can include the assembly if they are present. If only one camera is available, it is best to set it in the center of the worship space, so the cantor can look at the camera whenever possible

and engage both the in-person assembly and those online. If the sound system is not fully effective for livestream use, the psalm refrain can be displayed on the main screen or in the discussion box.

### **The Homily**

If there are worshipers in the church and online, the homilist may need to alternate their gaze toward the assembly area and the camera lens. However, if the majority of worshipers are online, and there is only one camera, it is more beneficial to place that camera in the center of the assembly, so the homilist can simultaneously engage both the assembly on-site, as well as online worshipers.

Online Mass also offers the opportunity to use visual images as a means to complement and illustrate major points. While never a substitute for content, preaching in a digital environment can lend itself to complement spoken points and potentially provide transformative elements that speech alone is unable to capture. Media projection will not make a bad sermon good, but it can make a good sermon better.

### **Prayers of the Faithful**

Since the invitation to the intercessory prayers is addressed to the assembly, the presider could make eye contact with both those online through the camera and those present in the assembly area. If particular communities use online comments during the Mass, they can offer their individual prayers or as invited by the online hospitality minister at a designated time.

## **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

### **Presentation and Preparation of Gifts**

While one camera can capture the sanctuary area from afar, it would be good to also provide a closer view of the preparation of the gifts, so that those at home can see the movements around the altar a little closer. If an assembly is present, the camera could also include the gifts as they are brought forward, although that is highly unlikely and potentially unsafe during the pandemic, even with a limited number of on-site worshipers. Thus, simple instrumental music can accompany the abbreviated movements during the preparation time.

## The Eucharistic Prayer

Throughout the Eucharistic Prayer, the camera should remain stationary and focused on the altar. While the words to the acclamations, can be displayed on the screen or in the discussion box.

## The Communion Rite

If others are present, the camera can include the gathered assembly during Our Father, so that worshipers at home can connect with them in shared prayer. During the sign of peace, the presider can acknowledge others present, even if only one musician or lector. The view of the gathered assembly can continue during the communion procession and receiving of the Eucharist as the Act of Spiritual Communion Prayer is displayed for those at home.

## Concluding Rites

### Announcements

When the announcements are made, care should be taken that the people worshipping at home are included. The person announcing can alternate their gaze between those gathered and looking into the online camera. Information for announcements can be displayed on the screen to help reinforce receiving the information, along with letting everyone know how to access a video recording of the Mass for future use. Finally, the announcer can remind the online assembly that they can share any thoughts or reflections in the discussion box after Mass.

### After Mass

After the Mass has concluded, the same ministers who greeted everyone can return to thank the online worshipers for being present during the Mass and invite them to the next livestreamed Mass, along with any other prayer services or online events taking place during the week. They can also remind

online participants of the parish's prayers for those who cannot be present at Mass and invite them to contact the parish for any particular needs.

While the pandemic has upended parish life in many ways, it has also brought an opportunity to connect in new ways, attract new parishioners, and reconnect with those who may have had to move beyond parish and state boundaries. The inherent grace is that the opportunity for online engagement does not need to end when everyone is able to safely gather again, but can continue to evolve to meet future parish and pastoral needs. While it has been a difficult time, life can abound as Christ's disciples attested after the resurrection. Let us follow in their footsteps online, in-person, and beyond to the ends of the earth. Amen. Alleluia!

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent resource that specifically focuses on worship during the COVID-19 pandemic, see: "Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic," created by The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments (June 8, 2020): <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10369/resuming-care-filled-worship-and-sacramental-life-during-a-pandemic>. This resource focuses on four questions: What are the best ways we can keep physical distancing and disinfection protocols?; How can we enforce those protocols while also showing real hospitality that bridges all of our theological and social differences?; How will we find the leaders for all we now need to do?; How will we meet the increased need for financial and human resources as we incorporate physical distancing and ongoing, careful disinfection?.

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