

Music and the Mass

Every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation

The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (cf. Col 3:16). Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2:46). Thus St Augustine says rightly, 'Singing is for one who loves.' There is also the ancient proverb: 'One who sings well prays twice.'

Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are of themselves meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation.

In the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, however, preference should be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those to be sung by the priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the priest and people together.

All other things being equal, Gregorian chant holds pride of place because it is proper to the Roman Liturgy. Other types of sacred music, in particular polyphony, are in no way excluded, provided that they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action and that they foster the participation of all the faithful.

GIRM 39–41

Some Questions

- Are the musical priorities observed when choosing what to sing at Mass? (See document *Singing the Mass* downloadable from website below)
- What assists or hinders the congregation's song?

Practical Points

- Develop a repertoire of chant that can be sung at Mass even when there are no instrumentalists present.
- Work towards a common repertoire for the Eucharistic Acclamations that is capable of being used at all parish masses, including funerals.
- Make use of the Common Psalms to assist in the singing of the Responsorial Psalm, especially during the principal liturgical seasons.

Further References

General Instruction of the Roman Missal:
34–41, 46–48, 52–53, 61–64, 74, 78,
83, 86–88, 102–104

Celebrating the Mass: 43, 74–77, 80–90

Spiritus et Sponsa: 4

On Sacred Music

Redemptionis Sacramentum: 39, 57–58

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Questions for Groups

1. What is good about current practice?
What concerns do you have?

4. Who is most directly involved in these matters, e.g. liturgical ministers?
What formation/information is necessary to engage them in the renewal of current practice?

2. In what ways does the documentation affirm or challenge your current practice?

5. How will the assembly be engaged in the process?
What, in particular, needs addressing at Sunday and/or weekday celebrations?

3. Prioritise the issues you have identified.

6. How will you know whether the formation has worked?