

## Understanding the Mass: Entrance Chant

In his book, “What Happens at Mass,” Fr. Jeremy Driscoll describes the mystery of the entrance song in the context of the liturgy. He writes,

*The Assembly that God has called together rises to its feet and begins to sing. The beauty of song is not insignificant for what is happening. It bespeaks the beauty of the one faith in the many Christians throughout the world. Song expresses the unity of the faith in its various parts. Many voices together make one beautiful sound, a poly-phony, a symphony... This is the voice of the Church... Song is a mystery. There is something hidden in the singing of this particular community. This song echoes the hymn sung eternally in the halls of heaven. In fact, hundreds of thousands are singing and countless angels too.<sup>1</sup>*



Historically, the Church has always sung praises to God. The Gospel of Mark reads, *While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:22-26).*

The Catholic Church’s document “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship,” teaches us why we sing. The writers exclaim, *“God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source. Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises.”*<sup>2</sup> The writers add,

*A cry from deep within our being, music is a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things. As St. Augustine says, “Singing is for the one who loves.” Music, is therefore, a sign of God’s love for us and of our love for him. In this sense, it is very personal. But unless*

<sup>1</sup> What Happens at Mass, Driscoll, Pg. 17

<sup>2</sup> Sing to the Lord Par 1

*music sounds, it is not music, and whenever it sounds, it is accessible to others. By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension. Thus, it is no wonder that singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people.*<sup>3</sup>

It is important to understand that the Church encourages everyone to participate in singing praises to God. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states,

*Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the cultures of peoples and the ability of each liturgical assembly. Although it is always not necessary (e.g. in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people not be absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on Holydays of obligation.*<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, do you know,

*No other single factor affects the Liturgy as much as the attitude, style, and bearing of the priest celebrant, who “prays in the name of the Church and of the assembled community.”*

*“When he celebrates the Eucharist, . . . [the priest] must serve God and the people with dignity and humility,*

*may he says the*

*the faithful the living*

*importance of the*



*and by his bearing and by the divine words he must convey to presence of Christ.” The*

*priest’s participation in the*

*Liturgy, especially by singing, cannot be overemphasized. The priest sings the presidential prayers and dialogues of the Liturgy according to his capabilities, and he encourages sung participation in the Liturgy by his own example, joining in the congregational song.*<sup>5</sup>

The procession is moving and the chant has begun. All the faithful join in full, conscious, and active participation. *“The purpose of this chant is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers.”*<sup>6</sup> There are many options for the entrance chant. The text and music for the entrance song may be

<sup>3</sup> Ibid Par 2

<sup>4</sup> GIRM Par. 40

<sup>5</sup> Ibid Par 18-19

<sup>6</sup> Ibid Par. 142

drawn from a number of sources. “A: *The singing of an antiphon and psalm during the entrance procession has been a long-standing tradition in the Roman Liturgy. Antiphons and psalms may be drawn from the official liturgical books—the Graduale Romanum, or the Graduale Simplex—or from other collections of antiphons and psalms.*” Or “B: *Other hymns and songs may also be sung at the Entrance, providing that they are in keeping with the purpose of the Entrance chant or song. The texts of antiphons, psalms, hymns, and songs for the Liturgy must have been approved either by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or by the local diocesan bishop.*”<sup>7</sup> It is important to know that it is preferred that all types of entrance chant options are used. The antiphonal entrance chant is a beautiful way to foster unity, and it may be done in various ways. The General instruction of the Roman Missal states, “*This chant is sung alternately by the choir and the people or similarly by a cantor and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone.*”<sup>8</sup> Historically, “*The main place should be given, all things being equal, to Gregorian chant, as being proper to the Roman Liturgy. Other kinds 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.*”<sup>9</sup> No matter what form is chosen the music “*must be carefully chosen and prepared.*”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there are three judgments to consider when choosing the music for the liturgy. They are, liturgical, pastoral, and musical. **Liturgically**, which asks the question; “*Is this composition capable of meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth by the liturgical books for this rite?*”<sup>11</sup> Basically, the parts of the Mass need to be understood well so to insure “*the overall rhythm of the liturgical action.*”<sup>12</sup> For example, the entrance chant or antiphon “*have a character of a beginning, introduction, or preparation*”, while the communion chant or song, expresses “*the communicants’ union in spirit by means of unity of their voices , to show a joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the ‘communitarian’*

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid Par. 144

<sup>8</sup> GIRM Par. 48

<sup>9</sup> Ibid Par. 41

<sup>10</sup> Sing to the Lord Par. 122

<sup>11</sup> Ibid Par. 127

<sup>12</sup> Ibid Par. 137

nature of the procession to receive communion.”<sup>13</sup> **Pastorally**, “Does a musical composition promote the sanctification of the members of the liturgical assembly drawing them closer to the mysteries being celebrated? Does it strengthen their formation in faith by opening their hearts to the mystery being celebrated on this occasion or in this season?”<sup>14</sup> In addition, “other factors—such as age, culture, language, and education—must be considered” . . . and, one should never underestimate the ability of persons of all ages, cultures, languages, and levels of education to learn something new and to understand things that are properly and thoroughly introduced.”<sup>15</sup> The ultimate pastoral question asks, “will this composition draw this particular people closer to the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of this liturgical celebration.”<sup>16</sup> The next criteria are the **musical judgment**. “The musical judgment asks whether this composition has the necessary aesthetic qualities that can bear the weight of the mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy. Is this composition technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy?”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, “This judgment requires musical competence. Only artistically sound music will be effective and endure over time. To admit to the Liturgy the cheap, the trite, or the musical cliché often found in secular popular songs is to cheapen the Liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure.”<sup>18</sup> Remember, we want the faithful to experience Christ through prayerful song. Moreover, *Sing to the Lord* adds,

*Sufficiency of artistic expression, however, is not the same as musical style, for “the Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her own. She has admitted styles from every period, in keeping with the natural characteristics and conditions of peoples and the needs of the various rites.” Thus, in recent times, the Church has consistently recognized and freely welcomed the use of various styles of music as an aid to liturgical worship.*<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the day the music in the liturgy should praise and worship God, not focus on self. Then, the hymns should quote or pray the scriptures. Finally, the hymns teach, and hand on the faith.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid Par. 189

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Par. 132

<sup>15</sup> Ibid Par. 132

<sup>16</sup> Ibid Par. 132

<sup>17</sup> Ibid Par. 134

<sup>18</sup> Ibid Par. 135

<sup>19</sup> Ibid Par. 136

In his book, “The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Mass, Lawrence Johnson gives a snapshot of the history of the entrance chant. He writes,

*The majority of the western rites have traditionally accompanied the entrance procession with song. At Rome the trained body of double rows at the antiphonal fashion Entrance song or*



*members of the schola cantorum (a singers) arranged themselves in two entrance to the sanctuary. In these two choruses sang the Introit, i.e., a psalm which began and concluded with a short antiphon whose text was taken from the psalm itself, the epistle of the day, or even from a non biblical source. During Carolingian times (eighth and ninth centuries) an attempt was made to have the whole assembly sing the concluding “Glory be to the Father.” Eventually two major factors contributed to a curtailment of the number of verses sung: the rapid elaboration of melody and the abbreviation of the procession itself. As a result, the singing was reduced to the antiphon, one psalm verse, the doxology, and the repetition of the antiphon. The Introit became an independent chant frequently begun when the priest reached the altar. If not sung, it was recited by the priest after the prayers at the foot of the altar. The Entrance song, in which the whole assembly normally participates, once again accompanies the procession of the priest and other ministers. Great freedom is allowed in regard to the choice of its text.*

Have you ever heard the antiphonal chant during the procession? Do you participate in the entrance song? Are you willing to learn new music?

Nothing unites the Church of God more than many voices giving thanks and praise to God as one voice. “Of all the sounds of which human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, are capable, voice is the most privileged and fundamental” of all instruments in the liturgy. Other instruments are to accompany the human voice.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Sing to the Lord Par. 86

Image Sources:

Notre Dame Choir:

[http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/7e/2a/5c/7e2a5c95413e9f783b06f07321225c1d.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.pinterest.com/pin/420312577700092541/&h=515&w=736&tbnid=HbuiqbaK73Hn6M:&docid=olmkaQ\\_cwY7JYM&ei=a40WV\\_oD\\_I47uoATP05y4AQ&tbn=isch&client=safari&ved=0CGMQMyg8MDxqFQoTCMDgm\\_uZs8gCFQ43iAodzykHFw](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/7e/2a/5c/7e2a5c95413e9f783b06f07321225c1d.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.pinterest.com/pin/420312577700092541/&h=515&w=736&tbnid=HbuiqbaK73Hn6M:&docid=olmkaQ_cwY7JYM&ei=a40WV_oD_I47uoATP05y4AQ&tbn=isch&client=safari&ved=0CGMQMyg8MDxqFQoTCMDgm_uZs8gCFQ43iAodzykHFw)

Priest Praying the Mass:

[http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.acnuk.org/img.php%253Ff%253D/data/images/640px\\_wide\\_images/UK\\_Fr\\_Samer\\_Nassif\\_celebrating\\_Mass\\_at\\_Paisley\\_Cathedral\\_642px.jpg%2526p%253DcropTo%2526a%2525Bwidth%2525D%253D642%2526a%2525Bheight%2525D%253D360%2526o%253Djpg&imgrefurl=http://www.acnuk.org/news.php/375/united-kingdom-middle-east-peace-depends-on-christian-presence-says-lebanese-priest&h=360&w=642&tbnid=6jsK2kH1LGaMcM:&docid=wn7pj4c3mvl2M&ei=zI4WVoGqIofToATp-4KIBA&tbn=isch&client=safari&ved=0CCcQMygkMCQ4yAFqFQoTCIHAw6Obs8gCFYcpiAod6b0AQQ](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.acnuk.org/img.php%253Ff%253D/data/images/640px_wide_images/UK_Fr_Samer_Nassif_celebrating_Mass_at_Paisley_Cathedral_642px.jpg%2526p%253DcropTo%2526a%2525Bwidth%2525D%253D642%2526a%2525Bheight%2525D%253D360%2526o%253Djpg&imgrefurl=http://www.acnuk.org/news.php/375/united-kingdom-middle-east-peace-depends-on-christian-presence-says-lebanese-priest&h=360&w=642&tbnid=6jsK2kH1LGaMcM:&docid=wn7pj4c3mvl2M&ei=zI4WVoGqIofToATp-4KIBA&tbn=isch&client=safari&ved=0CCcQMygkMCQ4yAFqFQoTCIHAw6Obs8gCFYcpiAod6b0AQQ)



