



The Lord be with you. And with your spir-it.

A MORE ATTRACTIVE PRAYER

Musicam Sacram, 5, states that through the form of sung liturgy, “prayer is expressed in a more attractive way.” Our prayer is meant to be attractive. The liturgy should be outwardly beautiful.

But the attractiveness and beauty of the liturgy are of a particular kind. This is not the beauty of “art for art’s sake.” This is not the beauty of a cultivated elite class that visits the important museums and hears the important operas. Though the beauty of the liturgy may overlap with all of these in many ways, it has a different goal: not our cultural enrichment, but our transformation and sanctification. Beauty is never there for its own sake. It is there to make us holier.

We will strive to do our musical best when we chant the liturgy. The priest or deacon or cantor or lector will strive for proper breathing, good vocal production, accurate pitch, clear enunciation, and good projection. Seminaries, diocesan liturgy offices, and many others will offer training in how to sing the liturgy. Through our musical and artistic excellence in chanting the liturgy, our prayer will be more attractive. And through the attractiveness of our chanting, we hope and pray that we will be more attracted to God, the supreme Beauty.



Lord, have mer-cy. Lord, have mer-cy.

SHOWING THE HIERARCHICAL AND COMMUNITY NATURE OF THE LITURGY

Musicam Sacram, 5, states that through the form of sung liturgy, “the mystery of the Liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown.”

Everyone has a role in the liturgy, and there are many different roles. Not everyone is celebrant, not everyone is cantor, not everyone is deacon, not everyone is a member of the congregation in the pews. Chanting the liturgy highlights and makes clearer the communal nature of the liturgy. The schola chants the entrance antiphon (introit); the celebrant chants the greeting and the people reply; the deacon chants the invocations of the Penitential Act and the people cry out, “Lord, have mercy;” the lector or cantor chants, “The Word of the Lord,” and “Thanks be to God” rings back; the cantor chants the psalm and the people sing their refrain.

Every voice is needed for this type of liturgy. In the unity of voices, in the interplay of elements sung by varied ministers, we are drawn more deeply into the community of the Church which is the body of Christ. Through the rich diversity of the different parts of the body of Christ working together, the communal nature of the liturgy is apparent. As *Sing to the Lord*, 10, states,

“Through grace, the liturgical assembly partakes in the life of the Blessed Trinity,” which is a community of persons—Father, Son, and Spirit.

Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, with the ministers of each degree fulfilling their ministry and the people participating in it. Indeed, through this form, prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the Liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly Liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Musicam Sacram (1967), 5.



Lord, have mer-cy. Lord, have mer-cy.

ACHIEVING UNITY OF HEARTS

Musicam Sacram, 5, states that through the form of sung liturgy, “the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices.”

Music is an image or symbol of our unity in Christ. Chanting the liturgy is deeply communal, deeply relational. Without thinking about it consciously, we all breathe together as

we prepare our bodies and voices to express, “And also with you” or “Thanks be to God.” We listen to each other as we begin singing together, on the same pitch, with the same words of response. We move together in natural speech rhythm. You cannot do liturgical chanting in isolation. You can only do it with the rest of the body of Christ.

All of the cooperation needed to chant the liturgy—all the attentiveness to the other singers, all the patience with others’ vocal foibles, all the forbearance with their musical mistakes, all the delight in the spirited sound of the body of faithful—is a symbol of life in community. Singing calls us to unity and highlights our unity.

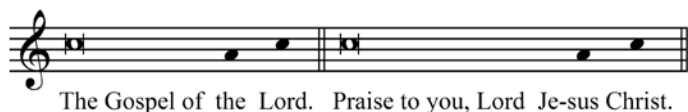


LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD IN FAITH

The *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981) recommends singing the acclamations before and after the Gospel reading so that the congregation can sing their responses, “Glory to you, O Lord,” and “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.” *Lectionary for Mass*, 17, states that “this is a way both of bringing out the importance of the Gospel reading and of stirring up the faith of those who hear it.”

Singing calls us to be attentive. It requires us to breathe in, to use more breath as we employ our voices more intentionally. Singing calls us out of our passivity and distraction. It makes us active and involved. It prepares us to hear the Gospel and calls us to hear the Gospel with a deeper faith.

The *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction*, 18, recommends singing the response “The Word of the Lord. / Thanks be to God” at the end of the scripture readings. By singing, “the assembled congregation pays reverence to the word of God it has listened to in faith and gratitude. Singing is a deeper expression of our reverence, and it calls us to be more intentional in our gratitude.



RAISING MINDS TO HEAVENLY THINGS

Musicam Sacram, 5, states that through the form of sung liturgy, “minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites.”

When we think of heaven, we naturally think of singing. The end of the Preface calls us to join with the angels and saints in their song of praise, *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*. The twenty-four elders in the fourth chapter of Revelation throw down their thrones and exclaim, “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power”

By singing the liturgy, we gain a stronger sense that we on earth are united with the angels and saints in the heavenly liturgy. In the resonant acoustic of the church building, with the hard surfaces that give support and direction to our singing, we hear not only the sound of our voices, but also the sound of the heavenly hosts ringing through the cosmos. As *Musicam Sacram*, 5, states, still referring to the sung form of liturgy, “the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly Liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.”



THE SOUND OF HUMAN BEINGS, CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

Sing to the Lord, 86, states, “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.” According to the document, musical instruments are secondary. They are an extension of the voice and a support for it.

Singing is one of the most basic things human beings do. Since the dawn of time, in the various cultures of the world, human beings have sung. Mothers have sung lullabies to their babies. Families have sung together before sharing a meal. Children at play have sung nursery rhymes. Saint Augustine reports in the fifth century that farmers sang psalms while working in the fields.

In our day, electronic recordings and earphones threaten to silence our singing. It is now possible to hear music all day long without producing any of it oneself. The liturgy calls us back to our humanity. The liturgy reunites us with our forebears. When we sing the liturgy, we are thereby made more human.

As Saint Irenaeus said in the second century, “The glory of God is a human fully alive.” Precisely by being more human through singing, we are sanctified and made to be more like God. As the glory of God shines forth in our chanting of the liturgy, we realize more deeply that we are made in the image and likeness of God. ♦

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