

Singing God's praise in a revised way

By Heather Reid

Second of three parts

IN THE FIRST ARTICLE OF THIS series (*Celebrate!*, Spring 2011) I gave a general overview of how music in the liturgy will be affected by the revised General Instruction on the Missal (GIRM) and the new translation of the *Roman Missal*, and introduced you to the new CCCB resource, *Celebrate in Song*. I also looked at the three new Canadian Mass settings and examined some points to consider when choosing a setting for a parish community.

In this article we will consider some other aspects of the liturgy which music ministers need to consider carefully: first, psalmody, and then silence. Then we will examine several other issues.

The responsorial psalm

The word *psalm* comes from a Greek word meaning, “A song to be sung.” Everyone is familiar with the responsorial psalm that follows the first reading at Eucharist. The preferred way of praying this psalm is the responsorial form: a cantor sings the refrain, the assembly repeats it after the cantor sings the verses, and then the assembly reiterates it after each verse. This has not changed in the revised GIRM: “It is preferable that the Responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people’s **response is concerned**. Hence, the psalmist, or the cantor of the psalm, sings the verses of the psalm at the ambo or another suitable place. The entire congregation remains seated and listens, but, as a rule, takes part by singing the response” (61).

In fact, the revised GIRM emphasizes the importance of the psalm: “The Responsorial Psalm ... is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and has great liturgical and pastoral importance because it encourages meditation

Where can we sing psalms during the Mass?

- the responsorial psalm is our response to God's Word
- during the entrance procession, particularly if a cantor is available to sing the verses
- during the communion procession, in which the psalm is part of the ritual action

on the Word of God” (61). This addition to the GIRM suggests that music ministers must pay attention to the psalm by giving it careful preparation so that it can indeed encourage the people’s meditation. Can the cantor sing the meaning of the psalm well with appropriate gesture, eye contact and, of course, correct melody and rhythm? Does the cantor study the assigned readings of the Sunday including the entire text of the psalm for the particular Sunday? Being able to help the congregation to meditate well on the Word may be directly linked to the cantor’s own meditation of the readings prior to the Sunday liturgy. Does the congregation know when it is supposed to sing? The assembly should not be listening passively as the psalm is sung.

What if your parish has limited music leadership or resources or your congregation does not usually join in the singing? The GIRM

provides for the use of seasonal psalms: “that the people may be able to sing the psalm response more readily, some texts of responses and psalms have been chosen for the various seasons of the year or for the various categories of Saints. These may be used in place of the text corresponding to the reading whenever the psalm is sung” (61). Singing the same psalm for an entire season can encourage people to sing the psalm rather than recite it, a less desirable option for a Sunday Mass. The Novalis-Gordon Johnson resource, *Psalms for the Liturgical Year*, which provides settings of all the psalms in the current lectionary translation, includes all the seasonal psalms. Before the psalms listed for Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, *Catholic Book of Worship III* lists one or two seasonal psalms which may be used for the entire season.

Singing psalms at other times

Psalms may also be sung at other times during the Mass. Singing psalms during the Entrance and Communion processions, which has a long history in the Roman tradition, has rarely been used since the reforms of Vatican Two. This may be because processional psalms were available only in Latin in the *Graduale Romanum*. Communities with limited musical resources may find having the congregation sing only a refrain during the entrance or gathering procession is a useful option if a cantor is available to sing the verses.

More successful, however, has been the practice of singing psalms, often in contemporary settings, during the Communion procession. This procession along with the singing and the sharing in the one bread and cup form the ritual action: the assembled body of Christ

processes forward to receive the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ (see St. Augustine: “Be what you see, receive who you are” *Sermo* 272). The GIRM describes the purpose of this song: “While the Priest receives the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun with the purpose of expressing the communicants’ spiritual union by means of the unity of their voices, of showing joy of heart, and of highlighting more the “communitarian” nature of the procession to receive Communion” (86).

Choose music to support and facilitate this ritual action. Asking people to sing a brief refrain for which they don’t need a hymnbook while they process is the best option. Use psalms or songs or hymns with refrains and several verses so that the music unifies the ritual action of processing and receiving communion. The early Church used three psalms during the Communion procession: Psalm 23—The Lord is my shepherd; Psalm 34—Taste and see that the Lord is good and Psalm 104—You provide the food they eat. Songs with refrains based on these psalms are still fine choices. *Celebrate in Song*, the new resource of the CCCB, and all current hymnals offer extensive selections of Communion processional music. The next article will consider more aspects of the processions of the liturgy.

There are different kinds of silence in the liturgy

- at the Penitential Act and after the invitation to pray, it is the silence of recollection
- at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, it is the silence of meditation
- after the communion procession has concluded, it is the common silence of praise and thanksgiving

Before the liturgy silence can help us prepare to engage in the sacred action

Silence

The revised GIRM also emphasizes the role of silence in the liturgy. Silence is not merely the absence of noise or sound. Liturgical silence is part of the full, conscious and active participation the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

What are the times for silence in the liturgy?

1. After the invitation, “Let us pray.”
2. Before the Liturgy of the Word begins
3. After the first and second readings, and the homily.
4. After the communion procession has finished, and all pray together in silence.

called for (14). Silence enables reflection and meditation and helps the assembly to focus: Sacred silence, as part of the celebration, must be kept when appropriate. Its nature, however, depends on the time at which it occurs in each celebration. Thus at the Penitential Act and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what has been heard; after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts. Even before the celebration itself, it is laudable for silence to be observed in the church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room, and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner” (45).

Music ministers usually determine the length of the silence after the first and second readings. The silence after these readings, like the psalm, encourages and fosters meditation on the reading just proclaimed. I find that we usually cut silence short. Consider having at least 30 seconds of silence and working up to a minute before the cantor approaches the ambo for the psalm. (These 30 seconds are not the time for the cantor, accompanist or choir to be noisily shuffling music in preparation for the psalm!) The same applies to the silences after the second reading and before the gospel acclamation: “During [the Liturgy of the Word], even brief periods of silence are appropriate, accommodated to the gathered assembly, in which, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God can be grasped by the heart and a response be prepared through prayer. Such periods of silence can appropriately be observed, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Reading, and finally at the end of the homily” (56).

The GIRM also draws our attention to two other points: the role and nature of the gospel acclamation and the place of Latin in the liturgy.

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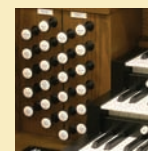


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The revised GIRM speaks about the importance of the sung gospel acclamation: "After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the Alleluia or another chant indicated by the rubrics is sung, as required by the liturgical season. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel, and professes its faith by singing" (62). Generally parishes do sing the gospel acclamation on Sundays; there is no change here other than to underline the importance of the gospel acclamation as a rite in itself. If we consider the other actions attached to the proclamation of the gospel (standing posture, candles, incense, signing ourselves and sometimes a procession) it is clear that the church considers the risen Jesus addressing us through the priest or deacon to have huge significance in our liturgies. Music ministers contribute to this by enabling the assembly to participate in this ritual action through our choice of musical setting for the acclamation. An acclamation is best always sung because singing best expresses the nature of an acclamation—a jubilant shout!

The revised GIRM mentions communities learning to sing some parts of the liturgy in

Latin, if possible. While the Church has always given pride of place to Latin, it is new that the revised GIRM (41) provides a reason and indicates what should be learned: For celebrations when people come from different countries, so that there can be a common repertoire, the GIRM suggests that communities learn "parts of the Ordinary of the Mass," especially, the profession of faith (now called the Symbol of

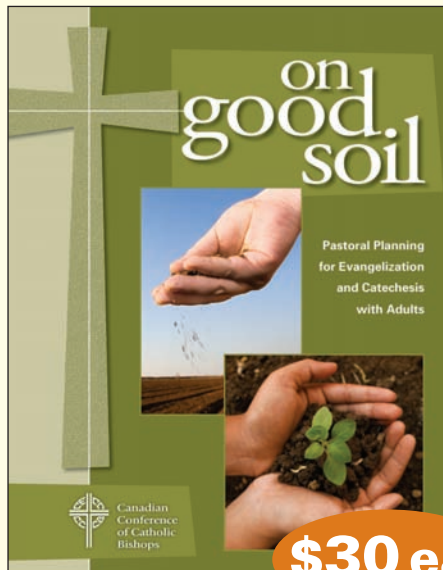
Faith) and the Lord's Prayer. The ICEL Latin chant version is found in the Roman Missal, in the *Living with Christ Sunday Missal*, and in *Celebrate in Song*.

Both the Symbol of Faith and the Lord's Prayer are considered secondary places for singing during the Sunday liturgy. Musicians must also consider the importance of hospitality before deciding that their community will sing the Profession (Symbol) of Faith or the Lord's Prayer. Both of these texts are known almost universally in our English parishes; when we add music to them, visitors to our celebrations can no longer join in because they do not know the musical versions. Focus instead on the primary places for singing (the Eucharistic acclamations, the Psalm, Gospel Acclamation and Lamb of God, and Entrance and Communion hymns) until the necessity for learning the Latin parts presents itself in your particular community. If your community already sings the liturgy in Latin on Sundays, this advice does not apply.

In the next and final article we will consider singing during processions, the Kyrie and Gloria, why and how we choose music for Mass and how hymn/song texts are formational. Stay tuned! †

Musical elements in order of importance

- Eucharistic acclamations: Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamation; Great Amen.
- Gospel acclamation
- Responsorial Psalm
- Communion hymn
- Entrance hymn
- Glory to God/Kyrie
- Symbol of Faith
- Lord's Prayer



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236 pages, softcover, 21.6 x 28 cm ISBN 978-0-88997-621-4

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