

Preparing for Worship

Singing the Mass

Song is the sign of the heart's joy (Acts 2:46). In liturgy, music has great power to reveal the divine and is integral for celebrating the rites well. Preference is given to singing significant parts; acclamations, the psalm and other ritual prayers. Hymns are secondary.

Words of Hymns

Although music may be popular and religious, the words may not be suitable for liturgy. Texts need to be theologically sound, inclusive if possible and well written, have rich imagery and be able to bear the weight of repetition. Texts that are scripturally based, express collective prayer ('we' rather than 'I') and relate to the liturgical action and season of the Church Year are preferred. Devotional and introspective texts are better in other contexts.

Liturgical Musicians

Liturgical musicians need support and ongoing formation. Long-term planning is required for this ministry. The ability and experience of musicians are significant factors when choosing music in liturgy so musicians should always be involved in liturgy preparation.

New Music

The full and active participation of those who gather is central so new music is best introduced slowly. It might be played as an instrumental then sung by a cantor/choir before the assembly sings it in subsequent weeks. Apart from the psalm of the day, new music should be used with discretion, particularly at large or special liturgical celebrations.

Live Music

Although some small communities rely on recorded music to accompany the assembly's song, live accompaniment is to be preferred. Communities blessed with many musicians should ensure that music serves the assembly. An unaccompanied cantor can be effective.

Music and the Order of the Mass

Before the liturgy formally begins

Music is helpful in encouraging a sense of prayerfulness before the first notes of the gathering song. Prelude music should not dominate or entertain but help people to prepare to celebrate. A warm-up of some kind can be most valuable. The act of singing together aids the process of gathering. Anything out of the ordinary for the assembly could be rehearsed. Teaching an entire song just before Mass is difficult especially if it is new to most of the assembly. Three to five minutes should be sufficient time; instructions should be kept to a minimum.

Gathering

The purpose of the entrance song, is 'to open the celebration, intensify the unity of the gathered people, lead their thoughts to the mystery of the season or feast, and accompany the procession of the presiding priest and ministers.' (GIRM 26) It should be a piece that the community knows well; weak participation can 'set the tone' for the whole celebration. As it is the first song, the note range (especially the high ones) should not be too challenging. The length of the hymn needs to be considered carefully (especially when there are many concelebrants).

Lord, Have Mercy (Penitential Rite)

There are a number of forms of the Penitential Rite. It is usually sung during Lent and Advent but not as often in other seasons. Simple settings are best else the introductory rites become too 'heavy' with music, and overshadow the Liturgy of the Word.

Glory to God

The Gloria is a joyful hymn of praise. Omitted during Lent and Advent, it is usually reserved for singing on Sundays and feasts. Elaborate settings with simple refrains are appropriate.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Responsorial Psalm

Psalms are sung prayer forms. An integral part of the proclamation- response dynamic of the Liturgy of the Word, the psalm is always sung. The psalm reflects the mood and images of the readings (usually the first reading) and presents an opportunity to respond prayerfully. Overproduced, harmony laden chorally sung verses may be out of place if they overpower the text (and are musically stronger than the Gospel Acclamation). If a setting of the psalm of the day is not known, another psalm may be chosen from the list of Common Psalms for each Liturgical Season in the Lectionary. Combinations of music and the spoken word are to be recommended only if a cantor is unavailable.

Gospel Acclamation

The gospel acclamation should be an attention-getter, a trumpet call to announce that the gospel is to be proclaimed. It should be powerful and always sung, even at unaccompanied Masses or where there is little other singing. Alleluias are sung outside Lent. A well known setting can enable the assembly to participate spontaneously and with enthusiasm. Using a single setting for a season is appropriate. Combinations of music and the spoken word are recommended only if a cantor is unavailable. NB: The time after the readings and homily should be quiet, allowing for meditation and reflection on what has been heard.

Profession of Faith (Creed)

This is normally recited on Sundays and solemnities only. The creed is rarely sung as it is a difficult text to set to music which everyone can sing with ease. The nature of the Profession of Faith is such that all should say it together.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)

The General Intercessions are the priestly prayer of God's people interceding for all humanity. Sometimes the assembly's response may be sung; the setting should be simple and reflect the communal nature of this prayer ('our' not 'my'). Often adaptation is needed in order to accommodate the changing intentions.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts

Contrary to common practice, it is not necessary to sing a hymn during this part of the Mass. The guiding documents indicate that this time is intended to be a low-key ritual element. It provides a transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and is an opportunity to reflect further on the readings and homily. An instrumental or choral piece that can draw in, rather than 'entertain' the assembly and continue until the accompanying rites are concluded is appropriate. The text can relate to the readings and homily, the season or be a general song of praise. 'Offering' hymns inappropriately pre-empt the Eucharistic Prayer.

Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the centre of the celebration; a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. It is wonderful to hear this prayer sung but it is unrealistic to expect all priests to have the confidence to sing it. Special occasions call for it to be chanted if possible. Many settings include simple music for the presiding priest.

Acclamations: Holy, Holy, Memorial Acclamation, Great Amen

Strong and affirmative, these are sung by the people. Additional instrumentation and choral harmonies are appropriate; they should not compete with or dominate the assembly's song but enhance and embellish it. Cantor-led settings may be useful for people who do not regularly worship together. Musical introductions should be brief, clearly provide the starting note and encourage people to sing straight away. Energy-wise, the Great Amen should be the strongest; the worshipping community gives assent to the entire Eucharistic Prayer. The acclamations are 'of a piece'. They should be seamless; all from the same setting whenever possible, or at least in the same key and musical style.

The Lord's Prayer and Doxology

Using an elaborate setting of the Lord's Prayer may detract from the prominence that belongs to the Amen and overload the Communion Rite. It may be best sung on special occasions with a simple setting. Singing may unintentionally prevent those from other traditions from participating in this great prayer of unity. If sung, then 'For the Kingdom' should also be chanted, as it develops the last petition of the prayer. Presiding priests should also chant the intervening prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ..' (the Embolism) if possible.

The Breaking of the Bread (Lamb of God)

In Apostolic times this gesture gave the entire eucharistic action its name (GIRM 56c). The Lamb of God accompanies the Breaking of the Bread. Litanies embellish and enrich the text (e.g. Bread of Life, Prince of Peace etc), and are helpful as it is difficult to pre-determine the length of the rite. Musicians continue the chant until the action concludes.

Communion Procession

The communion song 'gives expression to the joy of unity in the body of Christ and the fulfilment of the mystery being celebrated'. (MCW 62) Singing is important as it is a communal act. The text reflects the assembly's union in spirit, making the procession more fully an act of the Body of Christ. The text could relate to the readings of the day or the communion antiphon text. An appropriate psalm can also be chosen. A people's refrain can be supplemented with verses by a cantor or choir, enabling people to join in without carrying books (or song sheets). A single communion song unifies the rite.

Communion Thanksgiving

Silence is preferred after communion to allow people time to think, reflect, pray and absorb what has unfolded. If there is music, it should be a psalm or general song of praise sung by all present. A solo or choral piece at this time (a 'reflection') is not appropriate.

Recessional Song

Recessional songs are appropriate but not necessary; an instrumental or choral piece can accompany those who 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'. The text focuses on mission or action (i.e. putting, God's Word into practice). Like the entrance song, the recessional hymn may have differing musical forms (these can be creatively explored) and reflect the character and season of the celebration. An instrumental extension of the recessional song is particularly appropriate especially if people are still processing.



Music and the Mass

GUIDELINES

*For liturgy teams, musicians
and others involved in liturgy preparation*

*Sacred music will be the more holy the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite,
whether by adding delight to prayer, fostering oneness of spirit
or investing the rites with greater solemnity. SC 112*

Liturgical Commission

Archdiocese of Hobart
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