

## **MUSIC IN LITURGY**

3 broad areas:

- (1) Significance of the liturgy
- (2) Role of music in the liturgy
- (3) What is our role as the choir?

### **Liturgy – its significance**

1. We have often heard the use of the word “liturgy” being used to refer to the Mass. Actually, it means more than just the event of the Mass. Liturgy actually refers to the combined activity of the Church and its Savior during Mass.
2. We can think about these 2 activities by looking at the thresholds that are crossed when Mass is celebrated. 1<sup>st</sup> threshold is for us, the people to cross – this is the physical threshold of entering into God’s presence. When we step from our secular world over the threshold of our church, we need to realize that we have entered into a holy place, a place dedicated to the worship of God. At that point, we must fix our attention on why we are there and Who is there to meet us. When we cross through that threshold, we are actually entering into the chamber of our salvation. 2<sup>nd</sup> threshold is for Christ to cross – that is the spiritual threshold of the altar. During Mass, when Father consecrates the Eucharist, the altar becomes a spiritual threshold between humanity and divinity which Christ crosses to become physically present for us in the form of bread and wine. How often do we realize this on Sunday – the significance of this action. Do we even notice the time when consecration takes place? We must understand what is happening – only then will we be able to truly participate at Mass. Otherwise, we simply attend Mass and then leave it completely unaffected or bored by the whole thing.
3. At each Mass, we are called to encounter the living presence of our Savior and to be transformed by it. Yet, to many of us, it has become very commonplace that the Mass loses its significance.
4. For this reason, Pope John Paul II, on Holy Thursday this year, issued an Encyclical Letter called “Ecclesia Eucharista” which is a letter addressed to Catholics everywhere focusing on the Eucharist. The Pope himself says that he hopes the letter will “help to banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice so that the Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery”.
5. Don’t propose to read through his letter fully but I do want to pick up a couple of his ideas to share with you.

**Ecclesia de Eucharistia**

1. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist – by the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church was born and set upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. From the earliest of times, the Eucharist had been the center of church life.
2. The Program that the Pope has set for us in the Third Millennium is to contemplate the face of Christ and to contemplate it with Mary. To contemplate on Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence but above all in the living sacrament of his body and blood. By his body and blood, we are fed and enlightened (our eyes are opened).
3. The Eucharist is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history. That’s why it is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation that is happening in today’s world – Pope laments that Mass is being celebrated in certain places as tho’ it was a social event stripped of its sacrificial meaning.
4. Mass is “Mystery of Faith” because ordinary bread and wine get transformed into the real body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). It is a mystery because it surpasses our understanding and can only be received faith – through our faith, we believe that it has become body/blood when our senses tell us that it is just ordinary bread/wine. How often do we realize this fact? That’s the difference between the catholic faith and the other churches – they are merely doing a re-enactment. For this reason, we must refrain from receiving communion distributed by churches of our separated brethren so as not to condone the ambiguity about the nature of the Eucharist.
5. Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice especially when we participate in communion. We say not only that each of us receives Christ but that Christ also receives each one of us ie he enters into a friendship with us. Forms a union between Christ and his Church. We carry on this union when we worship the Eucharist outside of Mass – pleasant to spend time with him, to lie at his breast and feel his infinite presence.
6. Dignity of the Liturgy – when we realize what happens during a Mass, we would appreciate that the celebration of the Eucharist demands not only an interior disposition of devotion but also in outward forms expressions that are meant to evoke and emphasize the grandeur of the event taking place. This led to the development of the Liturgy as we now know it. He appeals urgently that the liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity. Liturgy is never anyone’s private property, be it of the celebrant or the community in which the mysteries are celebrated. He has asked the competent offices to prepare a more specific document clarifying and setting out these norms.

### **Understanding Key Parts of Mass**

1. The Kyrie – we are reminded that we are not always living in perfect harmony with God. In the Kyrie, we cry out in sorrow to our heavenly Father and beg for his forgiveness and mercy.
2. The Gloria – this is a very ancient hymn of praise that dates back to early Greek and Syrian. This comes immediately after the Kyrie because after we have made ourselves worthy in God’s presence, we do the 1 thing we were created for – to give praise and worship to God.
3. The 4 Great Acclamations

The Alleluia – we sing this to emphasize the importance of the Word of God in our faith yet this is often taken for granted. It is to remind us of the importance of the Scripture reading because Christ himself is present in a special way in the Liturgy of the Word.

The Holy Holy (Sanctus) – this is one of the greatest prayers of praise – it brings together the unity of the whole Church (those on earth, those in purgatory and the triumphant church) joining in praising God. Thus, it must be sung robustly!

The Memorial Acclamation – here we proclaim the mystery of our faith. The center of our faith: Christ has died for our sins, rose from the dead and will return in glory. All 3 elements must be present (for that reason, we can’t sing “He is Lord”) So, by singing it with our hearts, we are declaring our faith before all present.

The Great Amen – Amen ends the Eucharistic Prayer. By proclaiming “Amen”, we claim the sacred prayer and actions as our own. We unite ourselves with the perfect sacrifice of Jesus and prepare to receive him in communion. We profess that what has taken place is real and true.

4. Our Father Prayer – this starts the Communion Rite by immediately setting the theme that should pervade the whole Mass, especially during Communion. The theme is one of unity, among ourselves and with God – and starts with the word “our”. With its petition to the Father for our daily bread and forgiveness of sins, it is also an expression of our humility. It reminds us of whom we are in relation to God (he is the Creator, we the created).
5. The Lamb of God – accompanies the breaking of bread which signifies that we who are many are made 1 body in the one of life which is Christ. As the body of Jesus was broken to take away our sins, it is also broken again to nourish us in our constant efforts to rise above sinfulness and grow in goodness.
6. The Hymns (for each explain how we choose the appropriate hymn):

Entrance Hymn – this opens the Mass and its place is to call those gathered into focusing on what will happen during Mass, it deepens the unity among the people by getting those present to join their voices as one body, it introduces those present to the mystery of the particular season or feast and it accompanies the procession thus giving it extra significance and dignity.

Offertory Hymn (Hymn for Preparation of Gifts) – this accompanies the procession of the bread and wine which are brought to the altar and ‘offered’ by the Celebrant to God. In the early church, goods and produce were brought forward and given to those who could not afford these things. Part of the offering would include food for a meal together – in the old days, the congregation will actually have a festive meal before celebrating the Eucharist. Today, this has evolved into bring bread and wine together with other offerings (collections)

for the more needy member of church or the clergy. This represents a return to God of the best that human labour can produce. Should not be shorter than when the bread and wine are placed on the altar and shouldn't be longer than when the priest washes his hands.

Communion Hymn – we sing this as we go into procession. We must sing it with joy! There is no other way to meet God – even though our hearts are heavy with the burdens of life, we are going forward to meet the One on whom we can rest on. The song also signifies our unity as brothers and sisters. Together as one family of Christ, we raise our many voices to sing one song on our way to meet our brother. It can also be a song of reflection – allowing us to realize the significance of our meeting our brother in the Holy Eucharist.

Thanksgiving Hymn – not actually part of the official liturgy but has become part of it due to practice. Arose from the need felt that we need to thank Christ for coming to us in such a significant way. So as not to “distract” from the prayers being said by the people after receiving Communion, it is best sung after all, if not all members have stopped their prayers.

Final – brings a close to the celebration. Calls for its members to be transformed by participating during Mass and to strengthen as they head back to their usual lives.

### **Role of Music in Liturgy**

#### Encyclical of Pope Pius XII – Musicae Sacrae – 25 Dec 1955

1. St Augustine – “Music is given by God’s generosity to mortals in order to lead them to higher things.” In other words, music is intended to contribute to spiritual joy and the delight of the soul.
2. For that reason, you will find references to music throughout the bible – people often sing songs of victory or play tambourine etc. St Paul instructs us “when you come together each of you has a hymn”.
3. Sacred music, especially, when used in liturgy has as its only purpose to give the faithful the greatest aid in turning their minds piously to God through the works it directs to their senses of hearing. If we sing motivated by the love of God, we turn our music, our sacred labour of art into an act of worship that can effectively arouse and inspire people to profess their faith and cultivate piety.
4. Because sacred music has an important place in the actual performance of sacred ceremonies and rites, we must take great care to prevent anything that might distract the faithful from lifting their minds up to God, from entering into the sacred music which is the servant of the liturgy.
5. The lovely melodies must beautify and embellish the voices of the priest and of the faithful who praise God. Its special power and excellence should lift up to God the minds of the faithful who are present. It should make the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive and fervent so that everyone can praise and beseech God more powerfully, more intently and effectively.
6. The greatest honour and praise must be given to liturgical music.

7. All who use the art they possess to compose such musical compositions, to teach them or to perform them by signing or using musical instruments undoubtedly exercise in many ways a true and genuine apostolate. They will receive from Christ the generous rewards and honors of apostles for the work they have done so faithfully. So, they should hold their work in high esteem not only as artists but as ministers of the Lord and his helpers in the work of the apostolate.

Pope John Paul's address to the Participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music (Jan 2001)

Sacred music is an integral part of the liturgy. The Gregorian chant, recognized by the church as being especially suited for the liturgy is a unique and universal spiritual heritage which has been handed down as the clearest musical expression of sacred music at the service of God's word. Although, the church recognizes the pre-eminent place of Gregorian chant, she welcomes other musical forms. Indeed the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of popular religious music. This form of singing is particularly suitable for the participation of the faithful, both in devotional practices and in the liturgy itself. Popular singing, which is a bond of unity and joyful expression of the community at prayer fosters the proclamation of one faith and imparts to large liturgical assemblies an incomparable and recollected solemnity. Sacred music must serve its purpose "the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful."

Catholicism of the Catholic Church

1. The musical tradition of the universal church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy.
2. Song and music fulfill their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are more closely connected with the liturgical action, according to 3 principal criteria: beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments and the solemn character of the celebration.
3. The harmony of signs (song, music, words and actions) is all the more expressive and fruitful when expressed in the cultural richness of the people of God who celebrate. Therefore, religious singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services, the voices of the faithful may be heard. Texts intended to be sung should be in conformity with church doctrine and draw chiefly from scriptures.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) – Pope Paul VI, 4 Dec 1963)

1. Liturgical worship is given more noble form when it is celebrated solemnly in song, with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people.

2. Choirs must be diligently promoted but bishops and other pastors must be at pains to ensure that, whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs.
3. While the church acknowledges Gregorian chants as specially suitable, other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations as long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action.
4. Religious singing by the people is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as liturgical services, the voices of the faithful may ring out.
5. Composers should feel that their vocation is to cultivate sacred music and increase its store of treasures. Let them produce compositions, which have the qualities proper to genuine sacred music, not confining themselves to works which can be sung only by large choirs but providing also for the needs of small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful.

**Once you know how important Music is to the liturgy, many of us will ask “How do we pick the right music to sing?” (Refer book)**

### **Role of Choir**

Choirs are not musical organizations performing to an audience. We are members of an assembly that comes together for Mass and yet, we need to serve that assembly through the art of music. We are there to use our musical talents to “energize” the worship of the people gathered.

So, if we are ourselves “dead tired” during service, how do we expect to “energize” others? Smile...!!! We are supposed to enable the congregation to attain the “highest peaks of communion with God and with each other.” Indeed, in old Byzantine tradition, the choirs are pictured as representing “heavenly powers”. So, we have to ask ourselves, are we doing that?

Be Good Examples.

What about musicians? What is demanded is more than accomplished musicianship. It requires you to possess the ability to touch the spirit of those gathered for worship, to intone melodies of praise, hope and expectation that truly reverberate within the hearts of God’s people. When that happens, art becomes prayer and an artist is transformed into a minister.

### **Questions:**

1. **As a choir, what can we do to improve the music liturgy at IHM?**
2. **As an individual member of Via Christus, what is the one thing I will do that will transform me from an artist (singer/musician) to a minister?**