



**Episcopal
Regional
Liturgy
Commission**

Principles for Choosing Hymns for Mass

1. The sacred hymns selected are carefully studied to aid, support, elevate and better the actions of the sacred liturgy as propounded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC1157): *".. sacred music fulfils its task according to three criteria: 1) the beauty expressive of prayer; 2) the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and 3) the solemn character of the celebration. All three criteria link sacred music intimately to the work of Christ in the liturgy and in our hearts."*

And in Musicam Sacram # 9: In selecting the kind of sacred music to be used, whether it be for the choir or for the people, the capacities of those who are to sing the music must be taken into account. No kind of sacred music is prohibited from liturgical actions by the Church as long as it corresponds to the spirit of the liturgical celebration itself and the nature of its individual parts, and does not hinder the active participation of the people.

Liturgical principles articulated in the following documents of the Church:

- (a) *Sancrosanctum Concilium (§112:... sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites. But the Church approves of all forms of true art having the needed qualities, and admits them into divine worship....Accordingly, the sacred Council, keeping to the norms and precepts of ecclesiastical tradition and discipline, and having regard to the purpose of sacred music, which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful, decrees as follows.*
- (b) *Musicam Sacram (§31, 5): In selecting the kind of sacred music to be used, whether it be for the choir or for the people, the capacities of those who are to sing the music must be taken into account. No kind of sacred music is prohibited from liturgical actions by the Church as long as it corresponds to the spirit of the liturgical celebration itself and the nature of its individual parts, and does not hinder the active participation of the people. Note: *actuosa participatio* - active or more accurately translated, actual participation of the faithful that was encouraged by Vatican II does not mean primarily congregational singing of hymns, but from the interior experience of being engaged in all parts of the Mass, including by listening and by sacred silence, when appropriate. For example, when a Scripture reading is recited by a reader or when the choir sings, all who are assembled participate by listening, following along, and meditating on the meaning imparted.*
*Sacramentum Caritatis on Ars celebrandi § 52 re *actuosa participatio*: It should be made clear that the word "participation" does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact, the active participation called for by the Council must*



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be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life.

The conciliar Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium § 58 encouraged the faithful to take part in the eucharistic liturgy not "as strangers or silent spectators," but as participants "in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, actively and devoutly"

(c) New Roman Missal:

1. The use of music at the Eucharist is primarily to enable the full, conscious and active participation of the assembly.
2. Composers can embellish the song of the assembly with choir harmonies or instrumental descants.
3. No style of music is excluded from the liturgy. All styles have the potential to be grace-filled and able to communicate Christ. Care should be taken, however, that the style does not have distracting connotations for those who have gathered. Particular care is necessary when adapting existing melodies. The structure of the liturgical text should be respected and the original text of the melody should not have unhelpful resonances. Consequently it is best to avoid the use of such melodies in composing for the parts of the Mass.

GIRM§ 40: Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are of themselves meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation

2. With the above principles in mind, each hymns are to be examine and judged in particular for its **doctrinal** (paschal mystery, ecclesial dimension, thematic, biblical), **literary** (language) and **musical merits** (strophic, verse-refrain, antiphonal, litanic...). As stated in Musicam Sacram #6: *The proper arrangement of a liturgical celebration requires the due assignment and performance of certain functions, by which "each person, minister or layman, should carry out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy." This also demands that the meaning and proper nature of each part and of each song be carefully observed. To attain this, those parts, especially should be sung which by their very nature require to be sung, using the kind and form of music which is proper to their character.*
3. Sacred music glorifies the Lord and sanctifies the people at worship. In CCC (1157): quoting Saint Augustine's experience: " ...music and song of the liturgy participate in the purpose of the liturgical words and actions: the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful." Liturgical music should not only **sanctify** the people but, also **edify** them.
4. Marian and Latin Hymns are integral to the Catholic repertoire of hymns.



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- Marian hymns are sung prayers. They are a way of expressing our relation with God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. It is an effective form of teaching and presenting what we believe - a *locus theologicus*. (The *Lauda Sion* and the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* serve as accessible summaries of doctrine and devotion.) Besides the Catholic Marian tradition is based on the Scripture and on its deeper and fuller meaning as developed by *sensus fidelium* and the *ecclesial magisterium*. This Marian doctrine is found in poetic texts and hymns - for example, the *Stabat mater* - which have enriched our liturgy.
- Gregorian chants as mentioned in Vatican II, according to the Constitution on the Liturgy, *'the use of the Latin language, with due respect to particular law, is to be preserved in the Latin rites.'*" and orders that: *"Pastors of souls should take care that besides the vernacular 'the faithful may also be able to say or sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.'*" (n.47). About the chant, it repeats Vatican II: *"Gregorian chant, as proper to the Roman liturgy, should be given pride of place."*(n.50). GIRM 41: *All other things being equal, Gregorian chant holds pride of place because it is proper to the Roman Liturgy.*

5. **CLASSIFICATION OF HYMNS:** The classification follows the terms that are used for the rites in the Liturgical celebration found in the New Roman Missal and the GIRM:

A. The Entrance:

The entrance chant is followed by an Entrance hymn

GIRM § 47: (a) *After the people have gathered, the Entrance chant begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. 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*

(b) the secondary role of the entrance hymn draws the attention of the assembly to the altar as the central focus point of the Mass, and it may also accompany the action of incensing the altar.

Elements for selection of Entrance Hymns:

- i. Open the celebration: entering into the banquet of the Lord
- ii. Foster unity: unity of all gathered to celebrate the Eucharist.
- iii. Introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity: focus on the theme of the Mass of the day.
- iv. Draws attention to the altar: focal point of the Mass

B. Offertory:

i. The function of the offertory hymn is to accompany the procession and highlight its communal aspects. Hymns expressing praise and joy as well as hymns of the season (e.g. Easter or Lent) are appropriate. The hymn need not speak of bread



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and wine or of offering. Soft instrumental music or silence may be chosen as an alternative preparation for the Eucharistic Prayer.

GIRM § 73: The offerings are then brought forward. It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or the deacon and carried to the altar. Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance.

GIRM § 74: The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory chant (cf. no. 37b), which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. The norms on the manner of singing are the same as for the Entrance chant (cf. no. 48). Singing may always accompany the rite at the offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts.

Sacramentum Caritatis § 47. the presentation of the gifts. ... This humble and simple gesture is actually very significant: in the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father. (GRIM §78) In this way we also bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world, in the certainty that everything has value in God's eyes. The authentic meaning of this gesture can be clearly expressed without the need for undue emphasis or complexity. It enables us to appreciate how God invites man to participate in bringing to fulfilment his handiwork, and in so doing, gives human labour its authentic meaning, since, through the celebration of the Eucharist, it is united to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

GIRM §78: The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he unites the congregation with himself in the prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice.

ii. Hence, the criteria for such hymns are that they should not reflect personal relationships nor should they be sentimental. The Mass is communal prayer among the faithful. Note in the GIRM Preamble: “ ..*the ancient Sacramentary commonly known as the Leonine – ‘As often as the commemoration of this Sacrifice is celebrated, the work of our redemption is carried is aptly and accurately developed in the Eucharistic Prayers. For in these prayers the priest, while he performs the commemoration, turns towards God, even in the name of the whole people, renders him thanks and offers the living and holy Sacrifice, namely, the Church’s offering and the Victim by whose immolation God willed to be appeased; and he prays that the Body and Blood of Christ may be a sacrifice acceptable to the Father and salvific for the whole world.’*”

Elements for selection of Offertory Hymns:

i. Communal aspects: not navel gazing but the entire congregation of the faithful join together with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice.



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- ii. Praise and joy: bread and wine brought by us and taken by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father
- iii. Confessing the great deeds of our God

C. The Communion:

The communion chant followed by a Communion hymn.

Communion expresses unity in the body of Christ. Through communion Christians are united with God in Christ and through Christ with one another in unity.

Sacramentum Caritatis § 14: Through the sacrament of the Eucharist Jesus draws the faithful into his "hour;" he shows us the bond that he willed to establish between himself and us, between his own person and the Church. Indeed, in the sacrifice of the Cross, Christ gave birth to the Church as his Bride and his body

Ecclesia de Eucharista §19. The eschatological tension kindled by the Eucharist expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven. It is not by chance that the Eastern Anaphoras and the Latin Eucharistic Prayers honour Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly "liturgy" and become part of that great multitude which cries out: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.

Elements for selection of Communion Hymns:

- i. unity in the body of Christ: unity of all gathered
- ii. united with the Church: unity of all gathered and the universal Church
- iii. united with the "heavenly liturgy"
- iv. Thanksgiving to the Lord for His redemptive sacrifice

D. After Communion:

GIRM §88: When the distribution of Communion is finished, as circumstances suggest, the priest and faithful spend some time praying privately. If desired, a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the entire congregation.

Elements for selection of After Communion Hymns:

- i. Praise and thanksgiving
- i. Recessional Hymn:
"The use of a final hymn at Mass, which keeps ministers and assembly in their place after the dismissal detracts somewhat from the dimension of missionary imperative present in the dismissal texts. The use of instrumental music, particularly an organ voluntary is more appropriate to this moment." – Celebrating the Mass: A Pastoral Introduction, Catholic Bishops' Conference of UK and Wales.
Is there a need for singing here? Can the congregation be educated on sacred silence and reverence in the house of the Lord?



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E. Christmas and Advent Hymns:

Advent: When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating [John the Baptists] birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: He must increase, but I must decrease (CCC:# 524;). The Advent time is marked by an eager longing for the birth of Our Saviour Jesus Christ.

From the Ordo: *The playing of the organ and other musical instruments and the decoration of the altar with flowers should be done in a moderate manner, as is consonant with the character of the season, without anticipating the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord (CB,236).*

The same moderation should be observed in the celebration of Matrimony (OM,32).

Christmas: Christmas is the feast of the Incarnation, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, as a little baby in Bethlehem, within the realm of history. While many Christians recognize Christmas as a celebration of Jesus' birth, the solemnity is also a festival of his Incarnation, that is, God becoming human in the person of Jesus. Christmastide is the name given for the time surrounding Christmas Day. The Church primarily celebrates Christmas from Christmas Day until the Solemnity of the Epiphany, which commemorates the manifestation of Christ as the Savior of the **whole** world (cf. Mt. 2:1-12). The Church has also traditionally celebrated Christmas for 40 days, culminating on the Feast of the Presentation (Feb. 2).

Elements for selection of Advent Hymns:

- i. Expectancy
- ii. Long Preparation
- iii. Ardent desire
- iv. Eager longing
- v. Hope

Elements for selection of Christmas Hymns:

- i. Incarnation
- ii. Prophecy realised
- iii. The prophecy lived
- iv. celebration

F. Lent:

From the Ordo: *It is not permitted to adorn the altar with flowers, and the organ and other instruments may only be played for the purpose of sustaining singing. An exception is made for Laetare Sunday (4th Sunday of Lent), and for solemnities and feasts (CB,252).*



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G. Marian Hymns:

Mary's mission is to lead us in obedience and faithfulness by her example to her Son, Christ Jesus. It is important to understand that Mary's motherly mediation in no way adds or takes away from her Son's unique mediation as the risen Lord in glory. Her true glory is ever to be entirely transparent to His and to lead us by her motherly love and compassion to her beloved Son and Savior.

CCC § 964: *Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death"; it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion:*

Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: "Woman, behold your son."

Lumen Gentium §60: *There is but one Mediator as we know from the words of the apostle, "for there is one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a redemption for all".(298) The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power. For all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ.*

Elements for selection of Marian Hymns:

- i. Her inseparable union with Christ
- ii. Strong faith in Christ
- iii. Foster the union of the faithful with Christ

G. Additional Notes:

Q. What is sacred music?

A: Sacred music is "that which, being created for the celebration of divine worship, is endowed with a certain holy sincerity of form," according to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in its Instruction on Music and the Liturgy, *Musicam sacram* (1967, ¶4). As defined by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), sacred music surpasses merely religious music when it is joined to the liturgical rite to become "a necessary and integral part of the solemn liturgy," whose purpose is "the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful" (¶112).

"As a manifestation of the human spirit," said John Paul II in 1988, "music performs a



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function which is noble, unique, and irreplaceable. When it is truly beautiful and inspired, it speaks to us *more than all the other arts* of goodness, virtue, peace, of matters holy and divine. For good reason it has always been, and it will always be, an essential part of the liturgy” (December 23, 1988).

Q: What are the characteristics of sacred music?

A: On the centenary of its promulgation, John Paul II urged us to revisit and learn from St. Pius X’s letter *motu proprio* on Sacred Music, *Tra le sollecitudini* (1903). Pope Pius distinguished three characteristics: “sacred music should consequently possess [...] sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality” (§2).

Concerning *sanctity*, for music to be sacred means it is not the ordinary, not the every-day. It is set aside for the purpose of glorifying God and edifying and sanctifying the faithful. It must therefore exclude all that is not suitable for the temple — all that is ordinary, every-day or profane, not only in itself, but also in the manner in which it is performed. The sacred words of the Liturgy call for a sonic vesture that is equally sacred. Sacredness, then, is more than individual piety; it is an objective reality.

Concerning goodness of form, the Latin speaks of *bonitate formarum*, “goodness of forms”: this refers to the tendency of sacred music to synthesize diverse ritual elements into a unity, to draw together a succession of liturgical actions into a coherent whole, and to serve a range of sacred expressions. Excellence of forms also serves to differentiate those elements, to distinguish the various functions of liturgical chants by revealing their unique character. Each chant of the various Gregorian genres presents a masterly adaptation of the text to its specific liturgical purpose. No wonder the Church has consistently proposed chant as the paradigm of sacred music.

Sacred music must be *true art*, says Pope Pius, “otherwise it will be impossible for it to exercise on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the Church aims at obtaining in admitting into her liturgy the art of musical sounds.” Beauty is what holds truth and goodness to their task. To paraphrase Hans Urs von Balthasar, without beauty, the truth does not persuade, goodness does not compel (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, I: 19). Beauty, as expressed in the Church’s liturgy, synthesizes diverse elements into a unified whole: truth, goodness, and the human impulse to worship.

Concerning *universality*, sacred music is supra-national, equally accessible to people of diverse cultures. The Church does admit local indigenous forms into her worship, but these must be subordinated to the general characteristics of the received tradition. By insisting on the continuous use of her musical treasures, especially chant, the Church ensures her members grow up hearing this sacred musical language and receive it naturally as a part of the liturgy.



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Q: What is polyphony and what makes it specially suited to liturgy?

A: *Polyphony* literally means *many voices*. Polyphonic music has two or more voice parts that move independently (or *contrapuntally*) to weave a musical fabric. The term generally applies to sacred vocal music from the late Middle Ages through the Renaissance. Polyphonic music occasionally sounds chordal (or *homophonic*), but the contrapuntal style is generally distinguished from the homophonic style in its approach to harmony. In homophony, chords are presupposed, and voice parts are written chiefly to fit into a chord. In counterpoint, voice parts are written more as individual melodies, with chords resulting from the simultaneous tones of the independent lines. This emphasis on the individual vocal lines shows the influence of chant, from which polyphony grew organically.

The “golden age” of sacred polyphony lasted from about 1400 until 1650, but composers of later eras continued to favor the contrapuntal style, especially when writing for the church.