



## Singing at liturgy

### Preparing for the new *Roman Missal*

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hen they crossed through the Red Sea, the Old Testament people praised God in song.

(Exodus 15) The psalmist tells of people who danced and sang with timbrels and harps.

(Ps 149) Long before the role of the cantor

emerged in synagogue practices, the people publicly chanted prayers and sang the Torah. Jesus and his disciples sang on their way to the Mount of Olives. Paul told the Colossians to “sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (3:16) Generations of Christians since have composed music to praise God – a simple melody or a polyphonic masterpiece, accompanied by large orchestras or a crude drum, voiced by a soloist or an assembly of thousands.

#### Why sing?

>> We value music. It engages the heart, expresses emotions and stirs the soul in ways that the spoken word cannot. But music is not merely an optional decoration of our liturgy. It is integral to it. We do not sing at liturgy, we sing the liturgy! Since music expresses and fosters faith, it allows us to more deeply enter into the mystery we celebrate.

The bishops at Vatican II recognized this when they noted that the “full, conscious and active participation of the

people was the aim to be considered before all else.” (SC 14#) The new Order of Mass had more than a dozen parts that could be sung, as well as numerous options for the priest celebrant. No longer were the people to be silent spectators.

Liturgical music’s primary role, then, is ministerial – it serves the liturgy. It allows the people to be more actively engaged, harmonizes with the liturgical season and day and supports the structure of the given rite. It allows the rite to unfold without overshadowing the ritual words

and actions. (*Sing to the Lord*, 68) Sometimes music accompanies a ritual action (*Lamb of God*); sometimes it supports a ritual action (an entrance hymn); and sometimes it is the ritual action (the *Gloria*).

#### What do we sing?

>> Not every part of the Mass is sung, but among those that are, we can recognize various categories. Knowing what they are helps us to appreciate some ancient traditions, to choose music wisely and to give priorities to what should be sung.

**Dialogues** are exchanges between the presider and assembly, e.g., *The Lord be with you. And also with you.* They are part of the presider’s communication with us and they both signify and bring about communal celebration. (STL 115)

**Acclamations** are “shouts of joy” from the assembly and, by their very nature, should be strong and musically appealing. Among these are the *Gospel Acclamation* – an Alleluia and verse before we listen to the words of Jesus. (In Lent, another verse replaces it.) We respond to the General Intercessions with *Lord, hear our prayer* or some other sung response. We add our own voices to the Eucharistic Prayer several times with our acclamations: We sing the *Holy, holy, holy* at the conclusion of the Preface. The memorial acclamation (e.g. *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again*) expresses our faith in the paschal mystery and in the *Great Amen*, we offer our final assent to the full Eucharistic Prayer.

The psalms are “the voice of Christ and the voice of the church at prayer.” (STL 116, quoting *Laudis canticum*, Paul VI, 1970) Since they are songs of praise and petition, they are meant to be sung.

The original place for hymns in the liturgy was actually the Liturgy of the Hours. A four-hymn structure was first added to the Latin Mass to allow participation. Now, vernacular hymns may be used to accompany the entrance, the presentation of the gifts, Communion, and, if desired, a recessional. These **processional songs** create a sense of community. The entrance song helps us to enter into our celebration and prepares us to hear the word of God. (GIRM 46) The Communion hymn fosters a sense of unity as we partake of the sacrament of unity.

**Supplemental songs** have no specified texts. These include a prelude, a preparation hymn or the song after Communion. (GIRM 164)

Other parts of the Mass also may be sung, including the *Lord's Prayer*, the *Profession of Faith* or *Creed* may be sung, but a simple setting should be used. (GIRM 68) The Gospel also may be chanted.

### How do we choose music?

>> Many parishes are blessed by trained pastoral musicians who, with the pastor, coordinate liturgical music. Liturgies always are prepared as a whole, not by selecting distinct elements. So music is chosen by looking at the readings and prayers of the Mass, as well as any ritual action it may demand.

Those who prepare the music take the following into account:

**The liturgical judgment** – Is this music capable of serving the structural and ritual aspects of the rite? Does it match the ritual action, e.g., are we singing of holy Communion at Communion time? Is this antiphon or verse called for in the liturgical books?

**The pastoral judgment** – Does this music draw the people closer to the mystery they celebrate? Does it help form their faith? Does it respect the age, culture, language or education of a particular assembly?

**The musical judgment** – Does this piece of music have the aesthetic qualities to bear the weight of the mystery being celebrated? Is it worthy music? Neither popular songs nor songs with cheap or trite musical styles are suitable for liturgy. While the church may applaud Gregorian Chant, the church has never adopted any one particular musical style, but has admitted styles of music from every period. (SC 123)

To these three qualities, we might add the “theological judgment” so that one may carefully examine all lyrics in light of sound doctrine.

### Who sings?

>> The simple answer to this is that we all do! Bishops, priests and deacons have texts that are assigned to them. Skilled cantors, choirs and instrumentalists lead our singing. But the assembly is the primary musical minister. All of us participate in sung liturgy – young or old, gifted with a great voice or not, we all must raise our hearts and voices to God in song. After all, all liturgy anticipates the heavenly liturgy and we are just warming up for the heavenly choir! ☩

# St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

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here is an oft-repeated myth that religious belief equates to intellectual shallowness. In

other words, rational thinking must necessarily lead to a rejection of God. This line of thinking is unfortunate. In reality, God is the answer to the intellect's quest for truth and search for meaning. Our longing for answers leads the mind inexorably toward the divine. And God, in turn, responds to the most profound questions of the human heart.

Such a quest to truly know animated the remarkable life of one of the 20th century's great intellectuals, Edith Stein. Born into a Jewish family on the feast of Yom Kippur in 1891, Stein was by her 20s one of the leading philosophical minds in her native Germany. The star pupil of renowned philosopher Edmund Husserl, Stein's studies opened new horizons in her search to know the essence of things and the source of their existence.

Philosophy also brought her into contact with Christian scholarship and thinking. Stein admitted that “the world of faith unfolded suddenly before me,” and she was moved to seek baptism in the Catholic Church. Despite opposition from her mother and a deep respect for her Jewish heritage, Stein's decision for Christ drew her also to the austere life of a Carmelite nun. Moved deeply by the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, and touched by the inexpressible compassion of the Holy Spirit, Stein found the truth for which she longed. She entered the Carmel of Cologne on Oct. 14, 1933, taking the religious name of Teresa Benedicta.

Her mind knew – and her heart understood – that the cross of Christ was the ultimate destination of all Christians. And as the shadow of national socialism spread over Germany throughout the 1930s, so the shadow of the cross fell upon the life of Edith Stein. Her Jewish roots endangered her and the Carmel of Cologne. She was moved to the Netherlands, but nowhere in Europe was she safe.

Drawn to the Old Testament figure of Queen Esther, a woman ready to offer her life for the salvation of Israel, St. Teresa Benedicta readied herself to do the same. The Gestapo came for her in the night, and, at the age of 51, Edith Stein died in the gas chamber of Auschwitz-Birkenau. While in the Netherlands, she had written an essay, *Scientia Crucis, The Knowledge of the Cross*. In taking up her own cross, she had found, as all Christians must, the final answers in her search for truth. ☩

