

OUR MUSIC, OUR FAITH

Dear friends in Christ,

We find ourselves in unusual circumstances liturgically, and for many, this is most noticeable in the music we sing (or don't sing) in the Mass. While the pandemic has prevented me from meeting many of you in person, I have fielded several questions and comments electronically. To help you better understand the whys and the why-nots of our liturgical music during the pandemic, I thought I'd share the questions and answers with everyone.

Q: Why aren't we singing very much in the Mass?

A: There are a number of reasons why we are not engaging in congregational singing during our Masses, and all of the reasons are grounded in everyone's safety and well-being. First, longer music means a longer Mass; particularly for the indoor Masses, that means more time of potential exposure when we gather. Second, group singing drastically increases the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Nearly twenty feet of distance is necessary between individuals, and our common masks do not sufficiently control the spread of aerosolized particles when singing. The best way to keep everyone safe is to drastically limit congregational singing until such a time that it can be done safely.

Q: Why aren't we singing songs that we know?

A: I would refer you to the answer above and the hymn *How Can I Keep from Singing*. Most of us love to sing—I know I do! And the communal aspect of singing is even more powerful than singing alone. If we were to select the hymns that “everyone knows,” everyone would be singing. This is great when we're not in the middle of a pandemic—but I can't in good faith encourage singing at this time.

Q: So what is it that you're singing at Mass?

Most Catholics are familiar with what is called the Mass Ordinary: the Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy...”), the Gloria, the Creed, the Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy...”), and the Agnus Dei (“Lamb of God...”). These are the texts that are the same at every weekend Mass. For those parts of the Mass Ordinary that are sung, I am singing simple Gregorian chant settings in English that don't require a piano or organ. We also have what is called the Mass Proper, the texts that change each day according to the lectionary. These texts form the basis for the Introit (entrance antiphon), Gradual or Tract (in lieu of a responsorial psalm), offertory antiphon, and communion antiphon.

In the coming weeks, I'll be explaining in greater detail the whys and why-nots of our liturgical music. In the meantime, I encourage you to meditate on the antiphon texts during Mass and listen carefully to the parts of the Mass Ordinary and try to learn them. We are all experiencing the world in drastically different ways than before, and I hope that we can use this time as an opportunity to engage with the rich musical history of our Roman Catholic Church.

AMDG,



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