

29. The Beauty of Music & Art in the Church

The purpose of liturgical music and art is to sanctify God's people, to proclaim God's love made flesh in Jesus Christ, and awaken minds and hearts to the transcendent mystery of God.

Key terms:

Gregorian Chant:	[also known as plain chant/plain song] is a monophonic style of liturgical music in the Roman Catholic Church, meaning there is only one melodic line. It is used to accompany the text of the mass and the divine office.
Polyphony:	The term 'polyphony' (from the Greek for "many sounds" is used to describe music that employs simultaneous yet independent melodies. Polyphony is a type of music where a typical choral piece has four, five, or six voice parts of nearly equal melodic interest: each presents the same melodic idea in turn, as in a round.
Hymn:	A devotional song, specifically written for the purpose of adoration or prayer, and typically addressed to God. The word hymn derives from Greek ὕμνος, which means "a song of praise".
Canticle:	A scriptural hymn text, similar to a psalm in form and content, but appears apart from the book of Psalms.
Acclamations:	"shouts of joy" which arise from the liturgical assembly as a meaningful assent to God's Word and Action.
Icon:	Religious work of art depicting Christ, Mary, Saints or angels, typically executed on wood which is venerated and used in prayer.
Choir:	An organised group of singers that lead the congregation in song as part of worship.
Cantor:	A person who leads a congregation in song during a liturgical celebration.
Psalter:	A volume containing the Book of Psalms.

THE PURPOSE OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP

- **Public Worship** – music is an integral part of the public act of worship of the believing community. Music is a most concrete and expressive way of announcing our belief and uniting our voices with one another.
- **A Dimension of Communication** - Singing is a language that God has given us to express our deepest longings, greatest joys, and most profound trust in the One who created us and loves us unconditionally.
- **A Corporate Act** - A single voice expresses the faith and love of one person. Communal song is shaped by the accumulation of many voices expressing faith and love. Therefore, communal song is a corporate act of prayer and praise.
- **To Unite the Community** - Congregational song unites not only our words and voices, but our hearts and minds. The hymn texts provide a common language with which to respond to God. The texts also shape our understanding of God's gracious love, the redemptive act of Christ and the Spirit-filled community of disciples.

- **To help us Hear God's Word** - hymn texts celebrate the various aspects of God's revelation in Jesus, in his ministry and paschal mystery, in the Church, in the saints and in the life of God's faithful people.

To help us Celebrate the Season - Some hymns have melodies that are used only during specific seasons, so the melody itself alerts us to certain narratives.

- **A means of Dialogue** - music provides the assembly with a melody for its dialogue, either with God or with other ministers in the assembly, drawing the entire assembly into the act of giving thanks and praise to God.

Full, Conscious and Active Participation – Music in the liturgy is intended to foster the full, conscious and active participation of all the faithful in the Church's public prayer.

THE MINISTERS OF MUSIC

- **The Assembly:** The primary minister of music is the assembly itself. By joining their voices in song the members of the assembly express their unity in Christ, acclaim Christ's presence in word and sacrament, and exercise their baptismal priesthood, offering a living sacrifice of praise to God.
- **The Cantor** - The principal role of the cantor is to proclaim God's Word by singing the verses of the psalm and to elicit the assembly's response.
- **The Choir** - Choirs exercise a distinct ministry within the liturgy. Most often the choir provides leadership by supporting the song of the assembly. Even though the choir may sing works beyond the competence of the assembly to sing, the choir is part of the assembly and enriches its prayer.
- **Organist and Instrumentalists** - provide the primary support for the song of the assembly and the other music ministers. At particular moments in the liturgy, instrumentalists lend dignity or create a meditative atmosphere for the people's prayer. Like all ministers of music, instrumentalists are not primarily performers, but rather servants of the Church's prayer.
- **The Presider** - The ordained or lay person who presides over the liturgy is also a minister of music. The presider, like other music ministers, always sings in order to add dignity to the liturgical texts and to foster the participation of the assembly in its song of praise to God.

WHAT MAKES A HYMN CATHOLIC?

- Is the hymn in conformity with Catholic Doctrine?
- Is the hymn expressed in image and vocabulary appropriately reflective of the usage of Scripture and the public liturgical prayer of the Church?

ART GLORIFIES GOD

Art, diverse forms of artistic expression, serve as a vehicle to honour and serve God, and everything that He created and called good. (Ps. 50:2; 1Cor 10:31; Col 3:23)

GOD IS THE ORIGINAL ARTIST, THE SUPREME MASTER CRAFTSMAN

The Bible begins by revealing God as the original artist, who conceived the universe and created it with exceptional craftsmanship, including the heavens, earth, and everything within them. (Gen. 1:1, 27,31; Gen 2:7; Job 10:8-9; Job 38:4; Ps 139:13-16; Is. 29:16)

ARTISTIC ABILITY IS GOD-GIVEN

God's love for beauty is evident in creation, and Scripture reveals that He has gifted some individuals with artistic abilities. (Ex.28:3; Ex. 31:1-11; Ex. 35:30-35;

ART IS A SKILL

God has given each individual particular talents and abilities to employ for His glory. Therefore, it is up to each individual to develop and nurture these skills. (1Chron 22:15; 2Chron 13-14; 2Chron 24:13; Jer 18:1-6)

ART IS BEAUTIFUL

Artists often find inspiration to create beautiful artworks because as they seek to capture and reflect the image and likeness of God.

- God provides detailed instructions for the construction of His temple. (1Kgs 6)
- God provides instructions about the design of the temple's furnishings. (1Kgs. 7:13-51)
- God has made everything beautiful in its time. (Ecc 3:11)
- Solomon describes the work of the hands of an artist. (Song of Sol 7:1)
- Paul describes the beauty that lies in all that is lovely, honourable, pure. (Phil 4:8)
- God is the artist-potter and we, the clay in his hands. (Is. 45:9)
- We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for Good works. (Eph. 2:10)
- All things in heaven and earth were created through Him and for Him. (Col 1:16)
- All glory and honour is due to God for he created all things. (Rev. 4:11)



The Beauty of Music & Art in the Church — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Does your faith community use sung responses, chant or psalms as part of its liturgical worship? If so, how does this enhance your worship experience?
2. In a liturgical setting (Mass), why should a choir never replace the active participation of the congregation in singing?
3. What makes music "sacred"?
4. What did St. Augustine mean when he said, "He who sings, prays twice"?
5. How does singing contribute to our growth as disciples?
6. What qualities should a good hymn have?

EXPLORE!

- Explore with candidates the difference between “Sacred” music and “Worship” music.
- Explore with the candidates some examples of music from the Scriptures. Why are they more suitable to certain parts of the liturgy than others?
- Explore with the candidates the relationship between sacred music and the sacred space.
- Are the psalms always “praise songs”? What does the Psalter teach us about the range of experience that we should reflect on and express to God in our personal and communal songs?
- Explore with the candidates some classical and contemporary works of art. In what way did the artist honour God and convey the mystery of the transcendent.
- Discuss with the candidates the artistic features of their local church. In what way do they unite the congregation in faith, lift minds and hearts in prayer, and transmit the mysteries of our faith.
- Explore with the candidates some well-known hymns: identify their central theme and what they reveal about the mystery of salvation.

PRAYER

Psalm 150 or Psalm 98

or

Gospel Reflection:	Sixth Sunday of Easter
Year A	Jn. 14:15-21
Year B	Jn. 15:9-17
Year C	Jn. 14:23-29

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Music & Art

Scripture

Ps. 150:1-6	Praising God through music and worship in the sanctuary.
Ps. 149:3	Praising God through music and song.
Ps. 96:1-6	A hymn of praise acknowledging God's majesty and creative artistry.
Ps. 40:3	Skilful music-making is important in worship and can serve as a powerful testimony.
Ps. 33:1-3	Praising God with various musical instruments.
1Chron 15:16	David commands the Levites to raise sounds of joy in music.
2Chron 5:13	Musicians and singers should unite in praise and thanksgiving to God.
2Chron 7:6	The ministry of the priest in offering worship to God through music.
2Chron 20:21-22	Music serves as a spiritual weapon can bring victory.
2Chron 29:37	The place of music in the offering of worship.
Ezra 3:10-11	When the foundations of the temple are laid, the priests sing in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.
2Sam 6:5	David celebrates before the Lord with songs, lyres and harps.
Mt. 26:30/Mk.14:26	Having celebrated the Passover, the disciples unite in singing a hymn.
Col 3:16	The connection between the word of Christ, music and worship.
1Cor 14:26	The place of music when believers gather as the body of Christ to worship.
1Cor 14:15	Uniting spirit and mind in prayer, through song.
Acts 2:46	Singing is the sign of the heart's joy.
Acts 16:25	Music can soothe emotions and foster unity among believers.
Eph. 5:18-19	Filled with the Spirit, sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs from the heart to God.
Heb 2:12	The congregation, united in prayer, sings praise to God.
Gen. 1:27	God created man in his own image, male and female he created them.
Ex. 35:35	God gave to each skills to undertake every sort of work.
Ex. 35:30-35	The Lord has filled Bezalel with skill, intelligence, knowledge and craftsmanship to devise artistic designs, cut stones, and carve in wood.
1Kgs 7:13-51	King Solomon begins the creative work of building and decorating the temple.
1Chron 22:15	The various skills of workmen.
1Chron 28:11-29:9	David gives Solomon his plan of the vestibule of the temple.
2Chron 4:1-6:42	The altar is created and set in the temple.
2Chron 24:12	The workman's skills in restoring the house of the Lord.
2Chron 2:5-7	God's house is decorated in gold, silver, bronze, fabrics and engraving.
Jer 22:14	The building of a great house, with cut out windows, panelling with cedar and painting.

Catechism

- 1156 The tradition of music in the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value.
- 1157 The connection between song, music and liturgical action in giving glory to God:
- Beauty expressive of prayer
 - The active participation of the assembly
 - Solemn character of the celebration
- 1158 The harmony of song, music, words and actions are more expressive and fruitful when expressed in the cultural richness of the People of God.
- 2501 Art is humanity's ability to create in order to give visual and audible form to matters of truth and reality.
- 2502 Art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God.
- 2513 Sacred art of its nature is directed towards the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands.

Additional Sources:

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* solemnly promulgated by his holiness Pope P VI, December 4, 1963.

Musicam Sacram, Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, 5 March, 1967.