

Praying Twice: Singing at Mass vs. Singing the Mass

by Father Eric Roush

Processing into Holy Trinity in my first weekend Mass as the new pastor, I was struck by the height of the church. As the opening hymn began my eyes were drawn upwards to the crucifix, lovingly preserved from St. Matthew's (I'd already been told). From there my gaze went to the stunning mosaic of the saints gathered around the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, worshipping God and reminding me that the Mass we celebrate here is our participation now in the same eternal banquet of the Lamb in Heaven. Entering the sanctuary, reverencing the altar, I moved to the presider's chair, realizing that, as I invited everyone to mark themselves with the sign of the Cross, I was unsure whether or not I should recite the words "In the name of the Father..." or if I should chant them as I'd been trained in the seminary.

Where I previously served as parochial vicar, we frequently bemoaned the challenges of a church coated with acoustic-dampening panels, sound-absorbing carpet, and a congregation scattered over too large a space. Now here at Holy Trinity I heard the resonance from tile and marble surfaces, the transcendent height of the church itself calling for elevated worship, and the close-knit community singing together. When I think of it a line from the psalms comes to mind: "Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord."



This happens to be the responsorial psalm in cycle A for the First Sunday of Advent. Beginning this Advent, here at Holy Trinity, we're going to begin singing more of the Mass. This is different than singing *at Mass*. We will be *singing the Mass*. What does that mean and why are we doing it? To answer this will take a few weeks of explanation in the bulletin, so please keep an eye here as we prepare ourselves for a deeper participation in the liturgy of the Church in the way she guides us to celebrate it.

We won't just drop it here this week, though. Such an announcement might be causing anxiety as change isn't easy, especially in something as important to each of us as the Mass. Our encounter here with Jesus and our community of faith, where we come to draw strength to face the challenges of life and find comfort in

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sorrow and suffering, shouldn't cause more stress in our lives. So, let me be clear on what will *not* be happening.

We will not be "going backwards" to a previous era in church history. Though Latin is our heritage and still the official language of the Roman Catholic Church, the Mass at Holy Trinity will generally be in English. We include hymns or portions of hymns in Spanish to welcome and engage the growing number of Latino members of the parish. Already used occasionally for our communion meditation, we will draw more from Taizé, which is a global ecumenical movement. Taizé includes some Latin phrases in an effort to offer an international language for common prayer in a diverse community. We won't be celebrating "the Latin Mass," more formerly called the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. Not that there's anything wrong with that; but neither is your pastor trained in celebrating Mass that way nor has a stable group within the parish requested it.

"When we sing, we pray twice," Saint Augustine tells us. Singing does incredible things in a community. Just as an example, when a priest simply says "The Lord be with you," how many times have we heard the response muttered back at him without realizing how important those words are? Ponder them: "The Lord be with you." Chanting those words, and others, will help us be clear, intentional, and focused in our worship through the Mass. The words of the Mass are the most beautiful words ever written—because they are largely drawn from Scripture, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Singing them affirms the exalted beauty of something so beautiful.

So this next liturgical year, we're going to start *singing the Mass*. We will take it slowly! Some of the parts might be slightly harder to learn, but none of it will be impossible. The next bulletin insert will briefly speak to how Catholics got to where we are with music at Mass and the direction the Second Vatican Council points toward. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. As your pastor my email address and phone number are always in this bulletin if you would like to talk more about this or anything else. Be assured of my prayers for you and our parish community. I ask that you please pray for me.