



Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

++ Mary will be taking some time off from blog writing over the next few months . However, Bob will continue adding his two cents to the He Said – She Said blog as scheduled - with maybe a few surprises in store! ++

Liturgical Music Guidelines – Gaining a New Perspective

Even if you're not involved in musical preparations for your parish, this article will give you a sound perspective and insight into the responsibility that your parish Liturgy/Music Director undertakes on a regular basis in this regard – with some ideas for your own personal growth and development.

Every now and then, the topic of selecting music for liturgical use comes to the surface. If you go online or to the library of your local Seminary, you will find books and articles *ad nasium* on this topic and related issues. While commentaries sometimes clarify insights (and sometimes confuse them even more), I find that the best resources are the Documents of the Church. Summer break (that time of the year when we have a few less rehearsals, meetings, etc.) offers us a wonderful opportunity to kick back and re-explore our roots.

By now, most of us have music and liturgy prepared for the summer, probably to around the 21st or 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (the end of August). For me, this is where I take some time to breathe, relax and reflect. I usually attend a convention or a series of classes in order to become revitalized in mind and spirit – and to again approach my ministry with a sense of newness and vigor. However, I realize that this luxury is not always readily attainable (or affordable) for many in our field. But rather than focusing on what we can't do, let's take a more positive approach: *What CAN we do?*

The Documents of the Church offer much - if we take the time to mindfully explore them. If going to a conventions or taking a class is not a possibility, how about some good old fashioned self-guided time? Below is a general plan that I might use when in this situation. I always try to design a week in which each day has a specific focus or set of topics to be explored. For example, if we were to consider a topic such as Liturgical Music Guidelines, I would delve into a historical perspective, then move to a general perspective, and finally to specifics. Granted, one could go into



much greater depth on any of these areas, but again, if the reality is a limited amount time or resources, then just spending a few hours each day of mindful reading and reflection can be a fruitful venture. I would also be sure to build in time for prayer, creativity and relaxation. In any event, here's an outline that might be a good starting place:

Begin and End Each Day with Prayer.

Whether spending the entire day or a just a few hours, take time to open and close with prayer. This can be attending Mass, praying the Divine Office (Morning or Evening Prayer), a rosary, or a short simple prayer, psalm or song. No matter what form you choose, the idea is to offer this time to God - asking for openness, grace, and refreshment of body, mind and spirit.

Day I (Historical Perspective): The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

Reflect on the following areas:

Paragraphs 47-57 give a beautiful explanation of the 2nd Vatican Council's vision of the Mass.

Paragraphs 102-111 outline the Liturgical Calendar.

Paragraphs 112-121 are the definition and explanation of Sacred Music.

Day II (General Perspective): The General Instruction of the Roman Missal

Reflect on the following areas:

Paragraphs 39-41 are about the importance of singing in the Liturgy

Paragraphs 46-90 explain the individual parts of the Mass, purpose and function.

Day III (Specifics): Sing to the Lord – Music in Catholic Worship.

This document isn't a very difficult read and loaded with great stuff. Taking a day to read this document would be well worth the effort – or if time is an issue, reflect on the following areas:

Paragraphs 110-136 give instruction on preparing music for Catholic Worship

Paragraphs 137-199 are about music and the structure of the Mass.

Day IV (Prayer and Creativity): Peruse the Roman Missal – and Play Music.

After 3 days of reading and mindful reflection on an academic level, this day would be more about prayer and creativity. Start off by taking some time to play your instrument – maybe some favorite pieces or just improvise. Sing some of your favorite songs, hymns or psalms. Take a favorite text and sing it (or play it) to a different melody – the metrical index in your hymnal is a great resource. Use this time to be prayerful – not necessarily in formal prayer, but offer praise and thanksgiving to



God for your abilities and talents. Lift up your musical expressions as they come from your heart. Let the words, melodies and sounds which you create join with the heavenly choruses in expressing yourself and offering yourself to our Creator.

Today we would then take time to peruse the Roman Missal and reflect on Entrance Antiphons and/or Communion Antiphons. How do they fit together in the day – or from week to week – or from season to season? If we were to choose an Entrance or Communion Chant based on a particular antiphon – what would we choose and why? How many hymns or songs do we know off hand that are based on any one of the antiphons? Maybe we're even inspired to write a musical setting for a given antiphon!

There are all kinds of ways this day can go. Let the Spirit move you and soar!

Day V: Go Have Fun.

Put away your calendar and “to do” list. Do an activity that you enjoy – either alone or with friends. Take a nice long walk in the country – enjoy a picnic by the lake – take in a museum – do whatever works for you! In order to perform any task beyond a mediocre level, personal relaxation is essential. Tiredness, fatigue and stress only help to make tasks burdensome or at best mundane. If you truly want to breathe life into your liturgical preparations –start by breathing life into yourself!

Final Thoughts

While music is a subject that's taught in school (and academically necessary for development), don't forget that music is also an art. There is a huge difference between just mechanically playing or singing the notes on a written page and giving your music life and breath – a true offering of praise! Likewise, there is a difference between knowing one's religion and actually having a relationship with our Lord. The selection of music goes far beyond “my favorite songs” or “what sounds good.” The responsibility of choosing music for liturgy is to aid in giving voice to our assemblies in worship – and to enhance their experience of worship, not as entertainment, but as true expression of their love and devotion to God.