

Singing the Gloria

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As the congregation sings the Gloria, God is being praised through the text of an ancient hymn. When the entire assembly owns the words of this hymn and sings from their heart, their joy in glorifying God reverberates throughout the church. Sometimes, though, for varied reasons, the assembly does not participate in this hymn wholeheartedly. As the priest celebrant, I have sometimes been pleasantly surprised with how well the assembly sang a setting and occasionally perplexed.

When the organ intoned the Gloria, from James Chepponis' *Jubilation Mass*, at the Easter Vigil, the assembly sang the refrain with a gusto that increased each time the refrain was repeated. However, I was surprised that more of the assembly did not join the cantor and choir in singing the verses. The setting had been introduced the previous November, and during the next four weeks, more and more people began to sing the verses. That setting of the Gloria, though, was set aside during Lent, and when it was sung again at the Easter Vigil, it became evident that time would be needed for the verses to return to the throats and bodies of the assembly.

On solemnities and feast days that fall during the week, our parish has sung the *Congregational Mass*, by John Lee. At first, I turned the first line into a refrain, since we did not have copies of the setting in our pews. However, as we've sung this setting, more people have joined in the singing of the verses. We will be able to sing this setting as through-composed, which is how it was written.

Considering settings of the Gloria, and the response of the assembly to them, I have reflected on what helps a congregation sing the Gloria: Is it the musical style of the setting? The size of the assembly? Is it the use of a refrain or through-composed setting? singing with accompaniment or a cappella? I offer observations based on personal experience as a musician and liturgist and on non-scientific polling of other pastoral musicians.

REFRAIN OR THROUGH-COMPOSED

Prior to the promulgation of the third typical edition of *The Roman Missal*, it seemed that more parishes chose to sing refrain settings of the Gloria than those that were through-composed. However, with the third edition of the Missal, an increasing number of parishes sing a setting of the Gloria that is through-composed, as encouraged by the Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship.¹

A number of directors of music ministry (DMM) that I polled noted that, as the congregation become more familiar with refrain-style settings, they will start to sing the verses with the cantors or choirs and take ownership of the text. One director noted that, when a refrain setting of the Gloria is sung, the assembly feels relegated to listening rather than singing the text. There is a place in the liturgy for interior active participation, such as the active listening to texts that choirs sing as they invite the

congregation to enter into the prayer of the liturgy.² However, singing assemblies intuitively affirm the truth of these words: "the church puts words into our mouths until they become our words of praise for all that has been given us."³ My informal survey affirms this, whether the gathered assembly is small or large.

MUSICAL STYLE AND SINGABILITY

Almost to a person, my impromptu survey of DMMs affirms that settings of the Gloria with a "singable" melody contribute to the assembly's willingness to lend their voices to this hymn. What does singable mean? Elements of singability include a range that is not too large, that is, the range is usually within an octave and not higher than the "D" in the octave above middle C and not lower than the B-flat immediately below middle C. Second, melodies in singable texts do not contain large jumps between notes. Musicologists describe singability in various ways. Most would say that an interval should not be larger than a perfect fourth (think of the beginning of "Immaculate Mary") or a perfect fifth (think of the beginning of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" or "Now the Green Blade Rises"). The melody of singable music contains stepwise movement between notes, as is evident in "Joy to the World," which steps down the scale. Chordal outlines, such as are heard in the beginning of "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today," enhance singability.

Some examples of settings that exemplify singability include the following:

Mass of Renewal: There are stepwise movements and the intervals are within the range of a fifth.

Cantor:



Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to peo-ple of good will.---

7 ALL:



Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to peo-ple of good will.--- We

f

13



praise you, we bless you, we a-dore you, we glo-ri-fy you, we give you thanks for

mf

19



your great glo-ry, Lord God, hea-ven-ly King, O God, al-migh-ty Fa-ther.

Mass of Redemption: The melodic intervals include fifths, fourths, thirds, and stepwise movement.

Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to
 peo-ple of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we a-
 dore you, we glo-ri-fy you, we give you thanks for
 your great glo-ry, Lord God, heav-en-ly King, O God, al-might-y

Jubilation Mass: The melodic movement starts with the interval of a fourth, includes stepwise motion, and the largest melodic jump is a seventh.

Glo-ri-a! Glo-ri-a! Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on
 earth peace to peo-ple, to peo-ple of good will.

Mass of Creation: The melodic intervals include a fourth, thirds, and stepwise movement.

Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth
 peace to peo-ple of good will.

Another feature of singability is rhythm. Leonard Bernstein suggested that US English is sung best in 3/4 or 6/8 rhythms. The previous examples reflect these rhythms. However, settings in 2/4 and 4/4 also provide a sense of confidence and sing well. Some examples include “Glory to God,” from the *Mass of Wisdom*, by Stephen R. Janco. The steady 4/4 setting invites the assembly into a consistent rhythm that offers a firm foundation. The popular setting by Dan Schutte from the *Mass of Christ the Savior* is also set in 2/4 and has proven to be popular because it is easily sung and includes some rhythmic challenge. Christopher Walker’s *Mass of St. Paul the Apostle* is in 4/4 rhythm and includes syncopation at the beginning and on the text “We praise you, we bless you.” This syncopation creates rhythmic interest and emphasizes the text in ways that wed text and melody well.

Mass of St. Paul the Apostle: The syncopation in the piece creates rhythmic interest and emphasizes the text to wed text and melody.

Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to peo-ple of good
 will. We praise you, we bless you, we a-dore you, we glo-ri-fy you,

Another example of syncopation, in 6/8 rhythm, is in the *Mass of Saint Ann*, by Ed Bolduc. The rests following the word “Glory!” and the dotted rhythms over “people of good will” emphasize the text without making the setting so complicated that the congregation cannot enter into the singing. We need to respect but at the same time invite an assembly to stretch their musical abilities.

Mass of St. Ann: Rests and dotted rhythms in this setting emphasize the text.

Glo-ry! Glo-ry to God in the high-est. Glo-ry!
 Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to peo-ple of good
 will. We praise you, we bless you, we a-dore you, we glo-ri-fy
 you, we give you thanks for your great glo-ry,

I need to note that this setting is published in both through-composed and refrain styles. Singability is an essential element if we want our people to sing the Gloria. This is true whether the style is more traditional by definition or what some might call contemporary.

Chant holds a pride of place in our tradition.⁴ Chant tends to respect the natural or spoken rhythm of texts, whether in Latin or the vernacular. It is a fine example of how text and music can be wed together in ways that exemplify the principles regarding melodic movement and rhythm noted earlier. Some settings that DMMs mentioned as being “successful” in this regard are the *Congregational Mass*, by John Lee (revised by Ronald F. Krisman), that I mentioned earlier; the *Gloria Simplex*, composed by Richard Proulx; and the setting in the Missal, a fine English adaptation of the Latin Gloria based on Chant Mass XV. Some parishes only use the chant setting from the Missal; others seldom use a chant setting. One DMM mentioned that the parishes in his diocese were encouraged to sing the chant setting from the Missal, and that they do so fully, consciously, and actively. Two benefits of this choice are: (1) familiarity with a melody that can be sung by large, multicultural gatherings of the faithful; and (2) singing a cappella with confidence and familiarity.

Congregational Mass: Chant respects the natural or spoken rhythms of texts.

Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to peo-ple of good will.

We praise you, we bless you, we a-dore you, we glo-ri-fy you,

we give you thanks for your great glo-ry, Lord God, heav'n-ly King,

O God, al-might-y Fa-ther. Lord Je-sus Christ,

Gloria Simplex: In some parishes, the assembly has responded to chanting the Gloria.

Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on earth peace to peo-ple of good will.

We praise you, we bless you, we a-dore you, we glo-ri-fy you,

we give you thanks for your great glo-ry, Lord God, heav-en-ly King,

O God, al-might-y Fa-ther. Lord Je-sus Christ,

Singability and style impact an assembly’s ability to sing this important hymn. Know your gathered assembly, the styles that help them participate, the rhythms that help them sing with confidence, and the compositions that wed text with melody.

ACCOMPANIMENT AND INVITATION

Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship reminds us that “of all the sounds of which human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, are capable, voice is the most privileged and fundamental. Musical instruments in the Liturgy are best understood as an extension of and support for the primary liturgical instrument, which is the human voice” (86). Whether sung without accompaniment, a cappella, or accompanied by instrument(s), our focus needs to be helping people sing the liturgy. One DMM mentioned that when she introduces a new Gloria, teaching the assembly well is most important. She practices the setting in advance, reminds the congregation that they already know the words, and compliments them. Practices that are simple, direct, and prayerful are most beneficial. Practicing a setting for a few weeks before it is sung at Mass can be helpful. If it is a refrain setting, teaching the refrain and using the piece the same day can work. The congregation will learn the rest of the melody as they hear the cantor or choir sing. Once the congregation knows the setting, they will enter into the text if invited to do so. Even a refrain setting becomes through-composed in practice. Play through melodies as a prelude for a few Sundays or as an instrumental at the Presentation of the Gifts. Whichever method you

use to attune the congregation to a setting, invite the assembly to sing. Practice so that they hear the melody in advance and feel welcomed to join in singing. After all, they already know the words. Practice and introduce new melodies in an inviting way whether your assembly is large or small.

When accompanying an assembly, make sure that the accompaniment supports the melody and the people. Make the melody heard clearly. Be sure that the instruments are not so loud that they drown out the congregation nor so soft that the assembly does not feel supported. This requires a delicate balance but one that a DMM can help accompanists learn and practice.

CONCLUSION

Your experience may affirm some of what I’ve written and lead you to question other parts of this article. My hope is that your response will invite you to reflect on your musical practice in light of what helps your assembly sing the liturgy. Choose styles that support entering into song for your people. Choose settings that reflect what the documents say about the place of music in our worship and how to make good liturgical, musical, and pastoral judgments. Then help the congregation sing “together . . . the sacramental presence of God to his people” (*Sing to the Lord*, 2).

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Notes

1. See Bishops’ Committee on Liturgy, *Policy for the Approval of Sung Settings of Liturgical Texts*, referenced in *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, 149, footnote 116.

2. See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, 12, and Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Musica Sacram (Instruction on Music in the Liturgy)*, 15.

3. Catherine Vincie, “The Mystagogical Implications” in *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of “The Roman Missal,”* ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 2011), 149. ♦

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