

Tridentine Community News

November 12, 2006

Chant Settings of the Mass

If you have been attending the Tridentine Mass for a while, you have surely noticed that on most Sundays, we sing Gregorian Chant settings of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. You may have also noticed that each of these settings is designated by a number (e.g.: Mass XI) and a name (e.g.: Orbis Factor).

In the 19th century, the Benedictine Abbey of Solemnes, in France, became a center of scholarship for Gregorian Chant. With the support of the Vatican, Solemnes (www.solesmes.com) has standardized chant notation and publishes numerous books on the subject. Interestingly, the chant we know today as popularized by Solesmes is actually somewhat different from ancient chant, but that is a topic for another column.

There are 18 chant settings of the Ordinary of the Mass (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei). Some have names as well as numbers. Although some are meant for certain liturgical occasions, in practice they are often used outside of their intended purposes:

- I – *Lux et origo* – For Paschal (Easter) time
- II – *Kyrie fons bonitatis* – For First Class feasts
- III – *Kyrie Deus sempiterna* – For First Class feasts
- IV – *Cunctipotens genitor Deus* – For Second Class feasts
- V – *Kyrie magna Deus potentia* – For Second Class feasts
- VI – *Kyrie Rex Genitor* – For Second Class feasts
- VII – *Kyrie Rex splendens* – For Second Class feasts
- VIII – *de Angelis* – For Second Class feasts
- IX – *Cum Júbilo* – For feasts of Our Lady
- X – *Alme Pater* – For feasts of Our Lady
- XI – *Orbis Factor* – For Sundays throughout the year
- XII – *Pater cuncta* – For Third Class feasts
- XIII – *Stelliferi conditor orbis* – For Third Class feasts
- XIV – *Jesu redemptor* – For Third Class feasts
- XV – *Dominator Deus* – For Christmas commemorations & ferias
- XVI – For ferias throughout the year
- XVII – For Sundays in Advent and Lent
- XVIII – *Deus Genitor alme* – For Advent, Lent, and requiems

In addition, there are several “*ad libitum*” (optional) Kyries, Glorias, Sanctuses and Agnus Deis, the most popular of which is the Ambrosian Gloria. The Ambrosian rite is the native rite of the Cathedral of Milan, Italy.

A music program must balance a desire to expose its congregation to a wide variety of Mass settings, with the need to repeat certain settings more often than others in order to help the faithful become familiar with, and indeed memorize, them. Tridentine Music Directors generally favor Masses VIII and XI because they are relatively easy to learn. In a sense, they have become famous

for being famous, as they are employed at most Latin Mass sites. Mass XVIII has also gained popularity at Novus Ordo Masses in recent years, as it the simplest of all to sing. Any effort to reintroduce Latin into the Mass should be applauded. (One could argue that we have EWTN to thank for setting a good example.)

Distinct from the Mass settings, there are six versions of the Credo. Almost every Latin Mass in North America uses Credo III, a particularly mellifluous and memorable melody. In Europe, Credo I rivals III in popularity.

Tridentine choirs typically use the Liber Usualis (commonly known as just the “Liber” [LEE-bear]) as their main music reference. This book contains not only the Ordinaries, but also the Propers (Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Offertory, Communion) of the Mass. Curiously, the only Liber edition currently in print is a 1952 edition (www.libers.com), which does not contain the Holy Week revisions of 1956. For later editions, one has to search used book sources. (The Liber is not produced by Solesmes.)

Solesmes’ publications are available in North America via Paraclete Press (www.paracletepress.com). These books are primarily intended for use in the Novus Ordo, although the Ordinaries have obvious application in the Traditional Mass. Two of the more popular books are the Graduale Romanum: The equivalent of the Liber for the Novus Ordo, containing the Propers and Ordinaries of the Mass; and the Kyriale, a subset of the Graduale Romanum, containing only the Ordinaries of the Mass, plus Asperges and Credos. Some Mass settings contain multiple versions of one piece. For example, Mass XI contains multiple Kyries; we usually use Kyrie B. Note that the Solesmes books’ designation of the multiple options does not always match the Liber’s designation. For example, Mass XI Kyrie B per Solesmes is the only Kyrie the Liber publishes for Mass XI.

These books are not perfect; they have not been updated with changes to the Novus Ordo over the past decade. However, they have also added to the diversity of available chants by adding new, yet eminently traditional, chants, such as additional versions of the Vidi Aquam.

Chant notation can be more challenging to read than modern musical notation, due to the numerous ticks and symbols one does not see in modern music. We are trying to assess demand for a Gregorian Chant workshop; if you would be interested in participating in a one or two day seminar, please see organist Wassim Sarweh at St. Josaphat or Matthew Meloche at St. Michael. This workshop will be intended for anyone, from a person in the pew as well as choir members. It will help you give greater glory to God via a more thorough knowledge of Holy Mother Church’s preferred musical form.