

Tridentine Community News

September 28, 2008

The Beauty of the Propers

Regular attendees of the Extraordinary Form Mass can get so accustomed to its structure that we take for granted aspects of the Holy Mass that are not part of the general experience of Catholics today. The Asperges and the incense that we use every Sunday, for example, are not seen in most suburban parishes.

Another unique characteristic of the Tridentine Mass, especially in Sung Masses, is the prominent role of Propers. The term “Propers” can be used in two senses: First, it can refer to all of the changing parts of Mass, including the Orations (Collect, Secret, and Postcommunion Prayers), Readings (Epistle and Gospel), and Antiphons (Introit, Gradual, Tract, Alleluia, Offertory, and Communion). In the second sense – the sense we are using here – it refers specifically to the Antiphons.

The Introit so centrally sets the theme for the Mass to follow, that Masses are known by the first few words of their Introit. For instance, the Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin is known as “*Missa Salve Sancte Parens*”, and the Mass of the 18th Sunday After Pentecost, pictured at right, is known as “*Missa Da Pacem, Dómine*”.

In a *Missa Cantata*, it is not obligatory for the (Antiphon) Propers to be chanted. Qualified singers are not always available. When the Propers are chanted, they may be sung in either the rather simple Psalm Tone or in full Solemn Tone, as you can see in the adjacent page from the *Liber Usualis*, the official book of chant for the Tridentine Mass. Well-performed Solemn chant from the *Liber* helps to establish the sacred character of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. CDs of this chant have become best-sellers, because it is music that transports one’s soul outside of the ordinary world.

Propers in the Novus Ordo

A little-known fact is that the Novus Ordo GIRM (General Instruction of the Roman Missal) states “...there are four options for the Entrance Chant: (1) the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the Psalm from the Roman Gradual as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the seasonal antiphon and Psalm of the Simple Gradual; (3) a song from another collection of psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) a suitable liturgical song similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.” Unless you attend St. Joseph’s Novus Ordo Latin Mass, when was the last time you heard Options 1, 2, or 3 employed in a sung Mass? You

may, however, hear the Introit (or “Entrance Antiphon”) read by the priest at a Mass without music.

The GIRM has another surprise: “...the following may also be sung in place of the Psalm assigned in the Lectionary for Mass: either the proper or seasonal antiphon and Psalm from the Lectionary, as found either in the Roman Gradual or Simple Gradual or in another musical setting; or an antiphon and Psalm from another collection of the psalms and antiphons, including psalms arranged in metrical form, providing that they have been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.” When was the last time you heard a Gradual sung in place of a Responsorial Psalm?

1056 18th Sunday after Pentecost.

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.
AT MASS.

Intr. 1. **D** A pácem, * Dó- mi- ne, sus-tinéntibus te,
ut prophétae tú- i fi-dé- les inve- ni-ántur : exáu-
di pré-ces sérví tú- i, et plébis tú- ae Is-
ra- el. *Ps.* Laetá-tus sum in his quae dicta sunt mí-hi : *
in dómum Dómi- ni í-bi- mus. Gló-ri- a Pátri.
E u o a c.

Collect.
D Irigat corda nostra, quaesumus | rátió : * quia tibi sine te placere
Dómine, tuae miseratiónis ope- | non póssumus. Per Dóminum.
2. A cunctis. p. 498. — 3. At the priest's choice.

Lectio Epistolae beati Pauli Apostoli ad Corinthios. 1. Cor. 1.
Fratres : Grátias ago Deo meo | nihil vobis desit in ulla grátia, ex-
semper pro vobis in grátia Dei, | spectántibus revelatiónem Dómini
quae data est vobis in Christo Jesu : | nostri Jesu Christi, qui et confir-
quod in ómnibus divites facti estis | mábit vos usque in finem sine cri-
in illo, in omni verbo, et in omni | mine, in die adventus Dómini nostri
sciéntia : sicut testimoniúm Christi | Jesu Christi.
confirmátum est in vobis : ita ut
Gradual. Laetátus sum. p. 560.

1. **A** L- le- lú- ia. * *ij.*

As for Communion, the GIRM says: “...there are four options for the Communion chant: (1) the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the Psalm from the Roman Gradual as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the seasonal antiphon and Psalm of the Simple Gradual; (3) a song from another collection of psalms and antiphons, approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) a suitable liturgical song...” Fortunately, the sung Communion Antiphon is beginning to make a comeback, thanks to the encouragement of the Church Music Association of America.

We live in the era of the Four Hymn Sandwich: Opening, Offertory, Communion, Recessional. Hymns were originally an option in the early days of the Novus Ordo. Their popularity and ease of singing has led them to effectively replace the official Proper Antiphons of the Roman Missal.

The Vatican hasn’t helped: There are different Antiphons in the (Latin) Novus Ordo Altar Missal (for use when the celebrant recites them) versus in the (Latin) *Graduále Románum* (for use by singers), confusing to say the least. And the latest edition of the Novus Ordo *Graduále* was published in 1974. It’s still in print, but Rome has not updated it with the additional feasts added to the 1975 and 2002 editions of the official Roman Missal. English editions of the *Graduále*, such as “By Flowing Waters”, are not well-known. Identifying the correct singable Propers shouldn’t be such a treasure hunt.

In the Tridentine Mass, these are non-issues. Our worship is augmented by the thematically-relevant text and Church-specified chant of the easily-identified Propers. Hymns have their place, but they do not replace the Propers, the official music of the Mass.