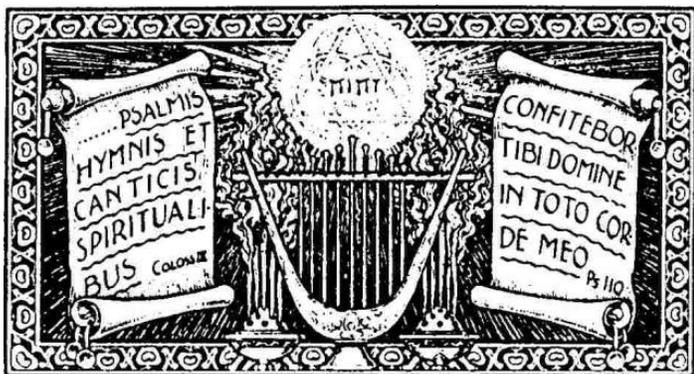


# THE PROPERS OF THE MASS: THE OFFERTORY CHANT AND THE COMMUNION CHANT



In a recent issue, we introduced the Entrance Chant as the Proper of the Mass for the entrance procession. As we continue to highlight aspects of sacred music in the liturgy, we now turn our attention to two other times during the Mass when processions are accompanied by Proper chants: at the Offertory and at Communion.

**What are the Propers of the Mass?** The **Propers of the Mass** are certain Scriptural texts, besides the readings, that are prescribed by the Church for various parts of each Mass, particular to the day and occasion being celebrated. These Scriptures were assigned early in the first centuries of Christian liturgy in the West, codified in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Pope St. Gregory the Great, and expanded and re-issued by order of the Second Vatican Council to reflect the Church's new three-year cycle of readings. The **sung Propers** include the **Entrance Chant** (or **Introit**), the **Gradual**, the **Alleluia** or **Tract**, the **Offertory Chant**, and the **Communion Chant**.

## **What is the Offertory Chant?**

*The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory Chant (cf. no. 37 b), which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. The norms on the manner of singing are the same as for the Entrance Chant (cf. no. 48). Singing may always accompany the rite at the Offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts. (GIRM #74)*

The most authentic Offertory Chant is the ancient Gregorian chant setting in Latin, which appears in the Church's official song book, the *Graduale Romanum*. Alternatively, the words of the antiphon may be sung to a different tune or in the people's native language. Because the antiphon is different at each Mass and is not sung in repetition as the Entrance and Communion Chants are, the Offertory Chant is best suited to the *schola cantorum* (school of singers) or one of its cantors, who have the important role of preparing the music for each Mass.

**Is other music suitable at the Offertory?** The rubrics allow another Psalm or liturgical hymn approved by the bishops to be sung at the Offertory. The Offertory rites often last longer than the procession of gifts, especially when the incensation rite is included. It is often possible to sing the prescribed Offertory Chant and then continue with other music until the priest concludes the Offertory with the ritual washing of his hands. The congregation may sing a hymn together or listen to a liturgically appropriate song sung by the choir or cantor while observing the procession of gifts and the sacred actions on the altar. Outside of Lent, the organ and other instruments may accompany the Offertory rites following the prescribed Chant.



## What is the Communion Chant?

*While the Priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun, its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the “communitarian” character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. The singing is prolonged for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful.[73] However, if there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion Chant should be ended in a timely manner. (GIRM #86)*

The Communion Chant is a musical setting of the final sung Proper text of the Mass. The antiphon may be repeated, with Psalm verses sung in between, for the duration of the Communion procession. As with the Entrance Chant, the Church rubrics allow the Communion Chant to be sung by the cantor or choir with the congregation responding, the choir and cantor in alteration, or the choir alone. **Whenever the antiphon is repeated in English, all assembled are welcome to join in singing it.**

Is other music suitable at Communion? The Gregorian chant setting of the Communion antiphon from the *Graduale Romanum*, the Church’s official song book, is presented as the ideal for the Communion Chant. Like all the sung Propers, the Offertory Chant may be sung to a different tune or in the people’s native language. The U.S. bishops allow the Communion antiphon contained in the *Missale Romanum* or another Psalm or approved liturgical song to substitute the antiphon contained in the *Graduale Romanum*. As during the Offertory, the music at Communion may be extended appropriately to include a congregational hymn, singing by the choir or cantor, and/or instrumental music. A time of reverent silence after Communion is also fitting.

## When the choir or ministers are singing, how does the congregation participate?

*The faithful should also be taught to unite themselves interiorly to what the ministers or choir sing, so that by listening to them they may raise their minds to God.*

### ***Musicam Sacram #15, Sacred Congregation of Rites (1967)***

At the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul we are beginning to re-discover the beauty and richness of the traditional Propers of the Mass. We now sing the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion Chants at all weekend Masses. We typically sing them in English to ancient Psalm tones but sometimes offer the Gregorian chant or a choral setting. All are encouraged to follow the Scriptures in our St. Isaac Jogues Missal, given in both Latin and English. **Whenever an antiphon is repeated in English, all assembled are welcome to join in singing it.**

As we celebrate the Joy of Tradition at the basilica, we honor the Church’s treasury of sacred music and will continue to explore the many and varied settings of the Propers of the Mass, composed through the centuries.

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*Our next issue will explain the significance of Gregorian chant in the Roman Catholic liturgy.*

## **References**

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM):

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/general-instruction-of-the-roman-missal/>

Musicam Sacram, Sacred Congregation of Rites (1967)

<http://www.adoremus.org/MusicamSacram.html>