

## The Revolution of Obedience

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*Presented July 22, 2016 at Southeastern Sacred Music's Summer Sacred Music Workshop*

### **Introduction**

Mother Church has given clear indications for sacred music in the rubrics and official documents issued by ecclesial authority over the past 50 years. They can be readily found with a few mouse clicks in this day of information. They seem pretty straightforward and clear: From Vatican II itself we read things like: SC 116 “The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman Liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.” SC 54 “. . . steps must be taken to ensure that the faithful are able to chant together in Latin those parts of the ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.” So says the Second Vatican Council.

From the fruit of Vatican II, the *Novus Ordo*, we read in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal:

“Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass . . . In the choosing of the parts actually to be sung . . . preference should be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those to be sung by the priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the priest and people together” (GIRM 40)

“Since faithful from different countries come together ever more frequently, it is fitting that they know how to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, set to the simpler melodies.” (GIRM 41)

“...In the dioceses of the United States of America 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.” (GIRM 48)

Now if this is the first time you have ever heard these, this is the reason for the workshop. If in that last rubric you wondered why hymns weren’t mentioned, this is the reason for the workshop. In most parishes you would be hard pressed to find any of these norms followed. But the question remains, “Are these to be normative?” Why is it so hard to find a parish where these ideals and rubrics are in place? If they are to be normative, then it should follow that even when exceptions are made, they should be exceptional? Right? And yet, when we study the norms we find them to be very rarely implemented in the average parish. What are we to do? This is where a whole generation of Catholic

musicians and priests are stepping forward in a sort of ‘revolution of obedience’ to the norms, taking up the call to implement these norms the Church has given to us for Sacred Music. Just as in the heady days after the Council when folk music was pouring out of the presses into the pews so now after 50 years, resources like Corpus Christi Watershed and all of their works, the Proper texts of the Mass set to music in the vernacular like Adam Bartlett’s Simple English Propers or “The Propers of the Mass” by Fr. Samuel Weber, OSB are readily accessible to us. Myriads of online, open source materials containing the riches of the Church’s Sacred Music like those found on the CMAA website “Musica Sacra” that a choir can download and sing for free are just a click away. These are the resources that fit into the continuity of tradition envisioned by the Fathers of the Council. We are in agreement with the Second Vatican Council’s statement that “The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art.” (SC 112) I don’t believe that they were speaking of the work of the St. Louis Jesuits when they said that. Creative and novelty are not liturgical virtues in the Catholic Tradition because the liturgy is not our own. We serve the sacred mysteries as handed down to us and there are certain types of music more suitable for the sacred liturgy because of its holiness, beauty and universality. Yes, there are adaptations from time to time, but always with a common thread of continuity. The collective wisdom of the Church through the ages has produced for us a model of divine worship founded upon the deposit of faith and inspired by the Holy Spirit’s guidance. This workshop is meant to expose you, the music ministers of the Church, to the Liturgy as envisioned by the Documents of the Church. I hope that in the course of this workshop you will come away with a broadened understanding of what the Church asks of you and also a few resources to make you ready for the implementation of these things in your own parish.

## **The Handbook**

In your workshop handbook we have attempted to include various textual resources to aid you in knowing the Church’s mind. There is a fantastic compilation found on page 169 and following entitled *Music and the Liturgy in the True Spirit of Vatican II*. This was reprinted with permission from the Sister Servants of the Eternal Word who compiled it from all the official documents pertaining to the Music and Liturgy of the Catholic Church.

Here and in other parts of the workbook you will find helpful items to form your understanding of what the Church desires and the tools to achieve it. We must admit that there will be a little tension in us when the Church’s requirements are a little arduous and seem to require change from the ‘status quo’. However, as was discovered 50 years ago, some change can be good. This applies likewise here. There is a saying, *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* (the Church is always in need of reform). The Church, now 50 years after Vatican II, cannot claim to be perfect. We are always in need of conforming our wills to that of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is where we must look to Mother Church and see in her also a teacher, *Mater et Magistra*.

## **Reform in Continuity**

One thing I always found curious was the lack of context for the liturgical changes that seemed entrenched by the time I came of age. As I entered the seminary I was given the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the reform of the liturgy of the Latin Rite. It did not make much sense to me and I did not appreciate what a wonderful document this was because I had no context with which to understand it. Maybe one of the reasons why many people are unfamiliar with things that are assumed in the rubrics even to this day is because they've never experienced what the Church was reforming and therefore have no grasp of the liturgical assumptions she had when she implemented these reforms. This is where I am firmly convinced that in order to celebrate the Novus Ordo well, one must have at least a working knowledge of the Ancient Form, that is, the Traditional Latin Mass. Some may critique the emphasis seen on the ancient form in recent years. But Pope Benedict XVI called for a mutual enrichment between the two forms (*Summorum Pontificum*). I know for a fact, that learning and celebrating the more ancient form has helped me to appreciate the hopes and desires of the liturgical reform during the Council. Here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul in Chattanooga the ancient form is at the service of the beautiful and reverent celebration of the Novus Ordo. That is, it is the bridge of continuity that helps us to rightly order our understanding of the path forward in the Novus Ordo. We have a sung Mass in the ancient form once a month, but we put our emphasis on the principal Novus Ordo Mass every Sunday. The lessons we learn from singing the Mass as our ancestors did for generations before help to form our choices and expressions in the Novus Ordo Mass. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. It's as easy as pie. Follow the recipe. Mother Church has already given us a sumptuous feast!

## **Scripture and Fear**

Another interesting thing that I have noticed as I have delved into the mystery of liturgical and sacred music is their intensely scriptural basis. The proper antiphons given every Sunday are usually just direct quotes from the scriptures. But how many Catholic musicians these days have never even heard the word 'the propers of the Mass' much less know what that means? This is a tragedy of epic proportions. We have replaced the Sacred Word of God with the trite musings of saccharine poets of the 60's, 70's and 80's who often have little or no formal theological training. At best we have the noble hymns of Charles Wesley, but even here we have to abandon our Catholic tradition to borrow from our Methodist brothers and sisters. Do we not have something of our own?

You don't have to buy new music. You don't have to come up with new ideas. You don't have to be innovative to be a Catholic Musician. The Music the Church wants us to sing is readily accessible in every Missal and the Gradual. Why would the Church have given us this music unless she expected us to sing it? Why do we never hear it? Why are we afraid of it? Part of it is because priests were never taught to sing, but this is part of their job! Part of it is because many people abandoned it for novel things and lost the art of singing it. There is a great fear of square notes out there! But let me tell you, chant notation is the most intuitive form of notation ever devised. It was the predecessor to

modern notation. Don't be afraid of the square notes. They're your friends. I guarantee you, if you know how to read harmony on a five-line staff, you will pick up square notes in no time flat. Even if you don't know how to read five-line, you'll pick up chant even faster. Sure, you have to learn a vocabulary of sorts, a neume, a clivis, a podatus, and a punctum, but once you see the picture, you'll figure it out, and soon you'll even prefer it.

Plus, Gregorian chant: it's our music! It's Catholic! We should get royalties for every Gregorian Chant CD that's used, cause it's ours. Claim the copyright! Your ancestors have passed on to you a treasure of inestimable value! Soak it in!

Yes, at times there is hostility, ignorance, and lack of acceptance. But we have to continue with our revolution of obedience. It's not about winning or losing arguments or debating the merits of one style or the other. We are following the indications of the Church and we must continue to do so with charity, education and joy. Obedience is not a mental disorder. In fact, it can be a great spiritual ascetic exercise that can bear much fruit.

## **Summary**

I would like to conclude with a clear set of goals for the workshop. You can find them at the bottom of p. 182 when it reads "What is the church inviting parishes and the ordinary practicing Catholic to do?"

In one point - The goal of this workshop is to give you the tools necessary to fulfill the Church's sacred music vision. Throughout the course of the weekend you'll be learning the ins and outs of things that might be new to you or might even be scary to you. We'll conclude with a celebration of Mass whose goal is to show the fullness and richness of the Mass as laid out in the rubrics and supporting documents of the Second Vatican Council. Let yourself be immersed in this truth, beauty, and goodness that Mother Church has given to us.

Do not be afraid of the adventure of stretching to the unknown if this is your first encounter with the Sacred Music Tradition of the Church. Do not grow weary if you have been at it for some time. Now is a time to rejoice. May Jesus Christ be Praised!