

“CANTARE AMANTIS EST”: SACRED MUSIC IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

“Singing belongs to one who loves.” The title of this column comes from St. Augustine, in a homily given on the occasion of the dedication of the Church. He was quoting from psalm 95: “Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord every land.” His sermon continues: “What it said there, ‘a new song;’ this the Lord said, a new commandment. For what has a new song unless a new lover? To sing is a ‘characteristic’ of a lover. The voice of this singer, is the fervor of holy love.” (*Sermon* 336.1) He also added in his own autobiography: “I feel that our souls are moved to the ardor of piety by the sacred words more piously and powerfully when these words are sung than when they are not sung, and that all the affections of our soul in their variety have modes of their own in song and chant by which they are stirred up by an indescribable and secret sympathy.” *Confessions* Book X, chap. 33

Why is it that so many Catholics struggle with singing? The reasons are manifold, but much of it has to do with a fear of not sounding very pleasing to the person next to us! Pride creeps in, and we do not give ourselves permission to put these concerns aside. In the seminary our voice teacher told us (that’s right— we all had mandatory lessons for a semester) that she could help **anyone** to sing. She was not kidding, backing up her claims with solid results. And while we may have smirked at music classes, we were **all grateful** in the end. In line with an age-old tradition, the **Second Vatican Council** taught that music “is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.” *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 112

At a family gathering a dozen years ago, I noticed a gift wrapped in a tiny box. Jewelry? Nope— it was a mini iPod, a device used for storing musical recordings. Imagine my surprise when I was informed that the thin as a match-box device could hold at least 2000 songs. “Two thousand songs? Really? I couldn’t listen to that many songs if I tried.” My nephew replied—“Sure you could, Uncle John.” Let’s see...Mozart alone wrote eighteen Masses, seventeen Church sonatas, two Regina Coeli’s, two Solemn Vespers, an Ave Verum Corpus and...and we haven’t even touched country music yet! Perhaps I could fill the iPod. When I bought a new car nearly two years ago, I removed the same six CD’s in my car that had been there for at least five years! I am hopelessly old school! But there is no dismissing the **importance of music** in people’s lives.

Sacred Music should be no different. Traditionally, sacred music has been thought to be characterized by several key traits, namely “holiness,” “true art,” and “universality.” **Mr. Lawrence Lawyer** excels at choosing appropriate hymnody, carefully considering the liturgical season, or like last Sunday, adding a hymn for our nation’s veterans. I readily admit the criteria are somewhat subjective and not particularly easy to discern in every case. Still, there are some basic canons of taste that apply, even as we admit that not every hymn will **strike a harmonious chord** with every listener (Sorry!). But by and large, these are rare because the music selected satisfies these criteria. Hymns are holy because they speak about God and truly give praise to Him, and do not overly focus on us humans as their subject.

We do not attend Mass in order to **sing about ourselves**, but to offer Him our praise and adoration. Hymns possess true art when they lift our minds and hearts upwards, towards God in adoration, and sound a melodic chord, not one dissonant or harsh. They are **universal**, as is the Church because worthy praise eschews being too tied to any particular culture or era. Like a blue button-down **oxford shirt**, truly quality music never goes out of style! When Pope Benedict XVI paid a visit to the Pontifical Academy of Sacred Music in 2007, he spoke of a legitimate development in the art of sacred music: “Precisely in view of this, the ecclesiastical Authority must work to guide wisely the development of such a demanding type of music, not “freezing” its treasure but by seeking to integrate the valid innovations of the present into the heritage of the past in order to achieve a synthesis worthy of the lofty mission reserved to it in divine service.”

The more that we strive to participate with our voices, the more we fulfill the aim of sacred worship. If we instill in our young people the love of sacred music, the more likely we are to ensure that these traditions will

be carried into the next generation, a generation consumed with iPods and technology. One way that we do that here is through our Children's Choir program, so ably led by **Mrs. Jayne Windnagel** each Wednesday afternoon. It is a commitment for our young people, but they receive solid formation in music and the theology **behind** sacred music. In just two months with our adult choir, **Mr. Christopher Ganz** has made immediate and noticeable strides. I invite men and women to prayerfully consider joining them. I have heard some excellent voices from the pews— why not share that gift from the gallery? St. Cecilia, patroness of music, pray for us.

- The last time the **Golden Gophers** gridiron squad was ranked this high nationally (7th in AP), I was but a twinkle in my parents' eyes. It was 1962, the year before I was born! Murray Warmath was the coach and **Carl Eller** (future Viking and NFL Hall of Famer) starred. But did you know that esteemed Cathedral weekday lector **Dick Warren** (#85) was on the 1961 squad that went to the **Rose Bowl** on Jan. 1, 1962? Might history repeat itself?
- I vividly recall the news breaking 30 years ago this month. A newly ordained priest, I was in awe seeing the **Berlin Wall come down** in a heap, seemingly out of the blue. When I visited Berlin with my parents in 1990 as part of a group tour, our experienced British guide became lost. For years, he had used the wall as a landmark to navigate his way around the city. Suddenly gone, he was thrown for a loop as our bus circled several times before finding our hotel.
- Next weekend, the Solemnity of Christ the King, I will make a special appeal to fund the installation of **security cameras** throughout the main Church. An **anonymous** donor has provided substantial seed money. We will begin with the interior of the main Church and I hope we can complete the project, as well as gather funds for fire protection measures for our dome and exterior cameras. **Safety and Security Envelopes** for this purpose are located at the piers. Please consider a gift for this worthy project.
- **Ouch**—this old house! While trying to be a prudent steward of your generosity, some **projects** could no longer be delayed: boiler power plant's new gutter system with heat tape to avoid treacherous icicle build-up (\$16,498); North Bell Tower new interior roof (\$17,879); rectory parapet wall and tuckpointing to stop leaks (\$38,948). I am preparing a parish financial report within the next month.
- Check out a locally produced musical by Catholic young adults at the Helen Houle Auditorium (Saint Agnes). See page 7 for more info.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel

Rector