

From Fr. Doug's Desk...

What's with all the singing?

Perhaps the most frequent comment I have heard from people is the amount of singing we do at Mass. While some find all the music inspiring, others ask, "Do we have to? Is it necessary? How come other churches don't sing this much? To find the answers we turn to the Church's document on the Liturgy, *Sing to the Lord*. I have quoted some paragraphs from it below, citing the paragraph number and have added some comments.

139. Singing by the gathered assembly and ministers is important at all celebrations. "**preference should be given** to those parts that are of greater importance". Namely;

a. Dialogues and acclamations. Among those parts to be sung, preference should be given especially to those to be sung by priest or deacon or the lector and people responding. This includes, "The Lord be with you. And also with you." ...Every effort should therefore be made to introduce or strengthen as a normative practice the singing of the dialogue between priest, deacon, lector or cantor and the deacon. The longest and most important dialogue between priest and people in the Eucharistic Prayer which begins with the preface and ends with the Great Amen.

Acclamations include the Gospel Acclamation, the Sanctus, the Memorial Acclamation, the Great Amen.

b. Antiphons and psalms

c. Refrains and repeated responses. These include the Kyrie (Lord, have mercy) and Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) of the Mass, and the response to the Prayer of the faithful at Mass.

d. Hymns

As you can see from the above quotes from the church documents, the amount of singing we do at Blessed Trinity is normative for the Mass. That means that what we sing each Sunday is what is expected. In reality, the entire Mass can be sung including the orations and the readings. (If you have ever seen the pope celebrate Mass on TV or in person, this is what is always done.)

On special occasions the readings or the Gospel may be sung to highlight a significant feast. Many churches chant the Gospel on Good Friday or the readings at the Easter vigil. When I was pastor at St. Mark and at St. Peter, I often sang the Eucharistic prayer

143. Verses and stanzas (of hymns) should not be omitted arbitrarily in ways that risk distorting their content. While not all musical pieces require that all verses or stanzas be sung, verses should be omitted only if the text to be sung forms a coherent whole.

Simply put, this means that all verses of all hymns should be sung.

So, the question remains, why don't other Catholic churches sing as much? It is a good question that I find difficult to answer. Perhaps the priest or deacon cannot carry a tune. Perhaps they are not up to date about the church's teaching about music in the liturgy. Perhaps the music minister does not have the competence to make it happen. Perhaps they realize that it is a lot of work on the part of priest, deacon, cantor, music minister, musicians and they just don't want to make the effort. Perhaps the congregation has not been encouraged to sing along and participate will full, active and conscious participation. All I know is what the church prescribes and it is my obligation and joy to provide good liturgy here. When it comes to music and singing, the document says it quite nicely. Music does what words alone cannot do. It is capable of expressing a dimension of meaning and feeling that words alone cannot convey (124)

And if you are thinking, but I don't like to sing, all I can say is that not singing is not an option in our liturgy. The Mass is structured in such a way that music is integral to what we proclaim each week and how we proclaim it.

So I ask you to open the Gather hymnal and "make a joyful noise unto the Lord" (psalm 98). 'The person who sings well prays twice' says St. Benedict. Our musical participation is tremendous. And if you don't sing well, at least take out the hymnal and pray along with the words. You will be setting good example for our children in the process, too. The words of many of our modern hymns are so beautiful. They are musical prayers. Each verse is a gift. Let us sing out with joy to the Lord.