

Bulletin Insert Two: How We Got Here

Ron Johnson and Fr. Alexander Witt

Last week, we began a series of bulletin inserts to discuss some additional chanting Fr. Walling, Fr. Witt, and Ron Johnson would like to implement here at Holy Trinity parish. If you missed last week's insert where we discussed in general how this desire came about and what these "additions" will include, it is available online and we invite you to check it out. As promised, this week we would like to focus on what happened to the music at Mass after the Second Vatican Council.

The Second Vatican Council is often portrayed as a rush of creative spirit which rushed into the whole Church during the 1960's and 1970's. The first section of Vatican II's document on the Liturgy summarizes it well. The Council sought to

*"impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore [saw] particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy."*¹

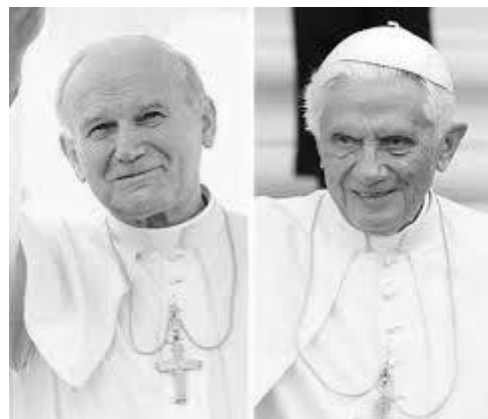
Many people within the Church—clergy and laity alike—became enthralled with what this could possibly mean and there was a general rush to "update" and "modernize" the Mass. Unfortunately, not many of those people really understood the vision these words were trying to convey, and in the process of the "update" a lot of the beautiful things, and particularly the beautiful music the Church had at her disposal, were discarded and declared *anathema*.

And so for the past 50 years, there have been two conflicting views of the liturgy and what the Council taught. Many theologians and liturgists have used the above statement of the Council as permission to abandon all that had been a part of the Church before the Second Vatican Council (e.g.) Mass in Latin with the priest facing God with the congregation; Communion received on the tongue while kneeling; and perhaps the

¹ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* no. 1

most painful loss: the beautiful sacred music the Church had spent centuries composing. None of these things were the intent of the Council, but they have taken many areas of the Church by storm.²

There have also been many courageous people—again, clergy and laity alike—trying to bring a more informed reading of the Council’s document on the liturgy to the parish’s liturgical life. Among these are Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Pope Benedict pointed out that “what earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful.”³ Their work to make the Mass more true to what the Council desired to bring about is what we are trying to accomplish with the additions we hope to bring to the Mass at Holy Trinity. History is showing that the actual intent of the Council was often misunderstood or misinterpreted. Vatican II did not want us to discard the beautiful things of the Mass and envisioned that the Church would continue using things like the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion antiphons.



Pope St. John Paul called on musicians to “make an examination of conscience so that the beauty of music and hymnody will return once again to the liturgy. It is necessary to purify worship of ugliness of style, careless forms of expression, and ill-prepared music.”

Instead of keeping true to this, for the past 50 years the Church has abandoned her musical tradition in favor of the Protestant “four hymn” model, using a hymn rather than Sacred Scripture when singing in the Mass. However, we have used this Protestant model for so long that not many people know or remember what these antiphons are.

Next week, therefore, we are going to focus on that. What are antiphons and why should we use them? What are the principles guiding their use and when is it envisioned that we sing a hymn at Mass?

God bless you all!

² In *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, for the use of Latin in the liturgy see no. 36; for the use of Sacred Music, particularly Gregorian chant, see nos. 112-121; for the priest facing the people during the Eucharistic prayer or for the reception of Holy Communion in the hands, these are not mentioned in this document because they were not envisioned as part of the reforms of the II Vatican Council.

³ See Pope Benedict XVI’s *Letter Accompanying the Motu Proprio “Summorum Pontificum”*.