

Music in our Liturgy

Fr. Alexander Witt

When I first processed into Holy Trinity Church with him and the altar boys, I felt pretty confident. But as the opening hymn was wrapping up I realized that I had no idea whether I should recite the words “In the name of the Father...” to begin the Mass or if I should chant them. In Cincinnati, I chanted that part of the Mass every morning. But what did Coldwater do? A hurried inquiry yielded the answer that I should just recite them. But there was a look in Fr. Walling’s eyes when I asked the question. Imagine my having to celebrate the rest of Mass worried that I had just offended my new boss!

After Mass, we had a meeting. In it, Fr. Walling asked me whether I had been trained to sing the Mass. His eyes lit up with excitement when I replied that, yes, I had been trained and that I loved to sing the Mass. When he asked why I loved to sing parts of the Mass, I had so many possible answers! We talked for a little bit about how singing parts of the Mass could help to bring a community closer together in prayer. We also talked about some of the most beautiful compositions that we had heard composed for a chanted Mass. By the end of the meeting, Fr. Walling revealed that he also loved to chant parts of the Mass. He then asked me him to help bring more chanting of the words of the Mass to our parish here in Coldwater.

I imagine at this point of my story, there are many different reactions. The past couple of months that I’ve been at Coldwater, there has not been a lot of chanting in the Mass. We chant the “Holy, Holy, Holy”, the “Mystery of Faith”, and the “Lamb of God”, but not much else. I’ve also heard that the parish chants the “Our Father” quite beautifully—but I have not yet heard this!



St. Cecilia
Patron Saint of Music

Some in the parish probably think that we already chant too much of the Mass. However, the Church has always taught that singing parts of the Mass is an important part of celebrating the Mass. Since the beginning of the Church, parts of the Mass have always been sung. St. Paul even commanded the Ephesians to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts!”¹ But why sing more in Mass?

Singing can do incredible things to a community. When a priest says “The Lord be with you” how many times have we heard people just slinging the response back at him without realizing how important those words are? Read them again. “The Lord be with you”. Chanting those words can help us to enter into the Mass and to concentrate on what we are doing at certain parts of the Mass. The words of the Mass are the most beautiful words ever written—because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Singing them can also lend beauty to something already so beautiful.

So this next year, we’re going to start to chant more in the Mass. We will take it slowly! Some of the chants might be slightly harder to learn, but none of it will be impossible. The next bulletin insert will explain how we got to where we are with music at Mass. What ever happened to those antiphons, like the Communion antiphon, which we used to sing at every Mass? What happened to the old settings of the *Gloria* that used to ring through our churches? Did Vatican II get rid of those? In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the parish. I am here to answer you. My email address and the parish’s phone number are on the bulletin if you would like to talk more about these developments.

God bless you! Fr. Witt



¹ Ephesians 5:19