



A Sacrifice of Praise ...
Hebrews 13:15



LITURGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR PASTORAL MUSICIANS

*2011 General Instruction of the Roman Missal
(GIRM)
Canadian Edition*

INTRODUCTION

- ◉ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal/GIRM, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 2002 is the fifth such instruction to accompany the Roman Missal since Vatican II. This document serves as a preface to the third edition of the Roman Missal which came into use in the English-speaking world on the First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2011.*
- ◉ *Far more fruitful is it to approach the GIRM as a diagnostic tool rather than as a simple “rule book”, for it is a rich resource for celebrating the liturgy with dignity and will inform those charged with the preparation of liturgical celebrations.*
- ◉ *There are numerous references to music in the GIRM which highlights the importance of music as a key element in the celebration of the Eucharist. Furthermore, the GIRM sets forth certain principles with regard to the choice, preparation, execution and place of music in the liturgy.*

1. SINGING IS NORMATIVE

- ◎ *The GIRM's most prominent liturgical music principle is that singing is normative in the liturgy, (nos. 39, 40, 115). While it is not always necessary to sing everything that can be sung in the liturgy, ministers and assemblies should sing on Sundays and holy days of obligation, (n. 40). The use of "should" in this directive indicates the obligatory and normative nature of singing.*
- ◎ *Whenever the GIRM lists the option of either singing or speaking an element of the liturgy (such as the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, etc.), the sung option is always listed ahead of the spoken option, which suggests the church's preferred option is singing.*

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION AND DECORUM

- Careful liturgical planning strives to achieve the full, conscious, active participation of the faithful in the liturgical action, (n. 18; cf. Vatican II Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 14).
- Decorum in liturgical music suggests that time is properly taken for the sung parts of the liturgy, that they are not rushed, shortened, or omitted for the sake of expediency.

3. SILENCE

- ◉ *The GIRM places significant emphasis on silence in the liturgy, that is, when not to use music. When the presidential texts are spoken, there should be no other singing or musical accompaniment so that those texts may be clearly heard and understood, (n. 32).*
- ◉ *Designated times in the liturgy are characterized by silence (n. 45), and pastoral musicians should resist the temptation to fill every liturgical space with music.*
- ◉ *The silences in the liturgy are not “empty” spaces but are often “charged” with meaning, prayer, and serve the unity of the assembly in their own right.*

4. PROGRESSIVE SOLEMNITY

- ◉ This principle is apparent in the directive that “in the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, preference is to be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those which are to be sung by the Priest or the Deacon or a reader, with the people replying, or by the priest and people together,” (n. 40).
- ◉ Ideally as a minimum, the “Ordinary” parts of the Mass should be sung, i.e. (***Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Mystery of Faith, Great Amen, Agnus Dei***).
- ◉ *The Entrance, Offertory, and Communion songs are of lesser importance as is the singing of the prayers of intercession and the psalmody. While it is customary in parishes to sing a recessional hymn, the GIRM makes no mention of music at this point in the liturgy.*

5. MUSICAL FORM AND PURPOSE

- ◉ *It is important to make use of a variety of musical forms, that is, singing alternately by the choir and the people, cantor and people, entirely by the people, or by the choir alone, (n. 48).*
- ◉ *The GIRM presents as liturgical law the practise of using the organ and other musical instruments with moderation during Advent, and playing them only to support the singing during Lent, (n. 313). Marking the changing liturgical seasons through greater and lesser use of instrumental accompaniment can serve to reinforce the assembly's experience of the different flavors of the liturgical year.*
- ◉ The decision-making process in selecting music needs to move beyond mere personal preference/desire for variety to ensure that the music actually accomplishes what it is supposed to at its particular moment in the liturgy, (cf. n. 47).
- ◉ Another important aspect of musical choice is the need to ensure that the music chosen is of sufficient quality (artistically, textually, and theologically) that it can bear repetition over many years' use in the community's worship.

6. THE CONGREGATION HAS A RIGHT TO SING

- ◉ Present throughout the *GIRM* is the principle that the congregation has a right to sing certain parts of the Mass. Here are a few examples:
 - ❖ Since the *Kyrie* is a chant by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy, it is ordinarily done by all, with the people and the choir or cantor having a part in it, (n. 52).
 - ❖ The **Gospel Acclamation** constitutes a rite or act in itself by which the faithful welcome the Lord who speaks. This acclamation is sung by all while standing and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated if appropriate, (n. 62).
 - ❖ In the *Sanctus* the whole congregation joins with the heavenly powers to sing to the glory of God, (n. 79b).
- ◉ The choice of music for the liturgy must not exclude the congregation's participation. That there are certain elements of the liturgy that are reserved to the assembly makes it clear that the choir and instrumentalists must not usurp the people's right to sing those parts of the Mass because this subverts the intentions of the ritual.

7. THE PSALMIST IS A MINISTER OF THE WORD

- ◉ *The GIRM assumes that wherever possible, the Responsorial Psalm will be sung. While other articles of the GIRM mention a “cantor” or “psalmist” in relation to the Psalm, n. 40 calls for the “lector” to sing. Hence, whoever proclaims the Psalm (whether sung or spoken) is a minister of the Word.*
- ◉ *Since the Psalmist is a minister of the Word, the GIRM states that the Psalm be proclaimed from the ambo or another suitable place, (n. 61).*
- ◉ *More explicitly, n. 309 states that from the ambo only the readings, the Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) are to be proclaimed. It may also be used for the homily and for the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it, and this includes the psalmist.*

8. RESPECTING OFFICIAL LITURGICAL TEXTS

- ◉ The *GIRM* is quite explicit about the importance of maintaining the integrity of official liturgical texts:
 - ❖ *It is not permitted to substitute other texts for those found in the Order of Mass, such as the Gloria, (n. 53).*
 - ❖ *Neither is it permitted to include alternate tropes in the Agnus Dei, (nos. 83, 366).*
 - ❖ *Furthermore, it is unlawful to substitute other non-biblical texts for the readings and the responsorial Psalm, which contain the Word of God, (n. 57).*
 - ❖ *While it is often easier to choose one of the many contemporary familiar paraphrases of the psalms, the *GIRM* upholds the integrity of the Psalm text (from the current approved Lectionary). Therefore, songs and hymns are not to be substituted for the Psalm. There are other legitimate places in the liturgy where psalm-paraphrases are licit such as during the communion procession.*

JUDGING THE QUALITIES OF LITURGICAL MUSIC

Three Judgments: One Evaluation

- In judging the appropriateness of music for the Liturgy, one will examine its:
 - ❖ liturgical
 - ❖ pastoral
 - ❖ musical qualities.
- Ultimately, however, these three judgments are but aspects of one evaluation, which answers the question: **“Is this particular piece of music appropriate for use in this particular liturgy?”**
- All three judgments must be considered together, and no individual judgment can be applied in isolation from the other two. This evaluation requires cooperation, consultation, collaboration, and mutual respect among those who are skilled in any of the three judgments, be they pastors, musicians, liturgists, or planners.

1. THE LITURGICAL JUDGMENT

- ◉ The question asked by this judgment may be stated as follows: **“Is this composition capable of meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth by the liturgical books for this particular rite?”**
- ◉ Structural considerations depend on the demands of the rite itself to guide the choice of parts to be sung, taking into account the principle of progressive solemnity. A certain balance among the various elements of the Liturgy should be sought, so that less important elements do not overshadow more important ones.
- ◉ Pastoral musicians should develop a working familiarity with the requirements of each rite through a study of the liturgical books themselves.

2. THE PASTORAL JUDGMENT

- ◉ The pastoral judgment takes into consideration the actual community gathered to celebrate in a particular place at a particular time:
 - ❖ Does a particular musical composition draw the assembly closer to the holy mysteries being celebrated?
 - ❖ Does it strengthen their formation in faith by opening their hearts to the mystery being celebrated on this occasion or in this season?
 - ❖ Is it capable of expressing the faith proclaimed by the Church in her liturgy?
- ◉ Other factors—such as the age, culture, language, and education of a given liturgical assembly—must also be considered. Particular musical forms and the choice of individual compositions for congregational participation will often depend on those ways in which a particular group finds it easiest to join their hearts and minds to the liturgical action.
- ◉ Similarly, the musical experience of a given assembly is to be carefully considered, lest forms of musical expression that are alien to their way of worshipping be introduced. On the other hand, one should never underestimate the ability of persons of all ages, cultures, languages, and levels of education to learn something new and to understand things that are properly and thoroughly introduced.
- ◉ The pastoral question, finally, is always the same: **“Will this composition draw this particular people closer to the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of this liturgical celebration?”**

3. THE MUSICAL JUDGMENT

- ◉ The musical judgment asks whether this composition has the necessary aesthetic qualities that can bear the weight of the mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy. It asks the question: **“Is this composition technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy?”**
- ◉ This judgment requires musical competence. Only artistically sound music will be effective and endure over time. ***To admit to the Liturgy the cheap, the trite, or the musical cliché often found in secular popular songs is to cheapen the Liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure.***
- ◉ Sufficiency of artistic expression, however, is not the same as musical style, for the Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her own. She has admitted styles from every period, in keeping with the natural characteristics and conditions of peoples and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in recent times, the Church has consistently recognized and freely welcomed the use of various styles of music.