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THE MINISTRY OF MUSIC

Revised Edition

Kathleen Harmon



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Introduction

Today, many years after the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy¹, singing the liturgy has become normative. But as we have grown in our practice of sung liturgy, our need to understand more clearly the theological reasons for this singing has also grown. Many of the “whats” and the “how-tos” have fallen into place, but the “why” often still eludes us.

As with the 2004 edition of *The Ministry of Music*, this revised edition approaches the “why” of liturgical music from the theological perspective that liturgy makes present the paschal mystery. As the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy teaches us, Christ achieved our redemption by “the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby ‘dying, he destroyed our death and rising, restored our life’” (5). Through baptism, we are plunged into this mystery: we die with Christ, are buried with him, and rise with him. From Pentecost onward “the church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery” (6).

This book explores communal liturgical singing in terms of how it enables us, the Body of Christ, to enter more fully into ritual enactment of the paschal mystery. The “whats” and “how-tos” of music ministry are then developed from this perspective. How does communal liturgical singing enable us to participate in and surrender to the paschal mystery? What musical and pastoral choices best enable the singing to fulfill this role? And how does

the singing form us in a paschal mystery spirituality that shapes daily Christian living and makes the relationship between liturgy and life more evident?

What has necessitated this revision of *The Ministry of Music* is the change in our liturgical-musical landscape precipitated by the appearance of *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*² (STL) in 2007 and the promulgation of the third edition of the Roman Missal in 2011. Some of what appears in this revision appeared in the first edition; some of what appeared in the first edition but not repeated here is still worth reading and contemplating. As with the first edition, much of what is included in this second version was originally published in my Music Notes column in *Liturgical Ministry*.

Digesting STL is a complex process. To discern the meaning and application of its directives requires quite a bit of cross-referencing within the document itself. To determine the weight of specific directives requires counterbalancing a great deal of “but” and “both-and” content. We cannot pick and choose single sentences or paragraphs without nuancing their content vis-à-vis other sentences and paragraphs. So, how do we approach studying, understanding, and applying STL? Perhaps the best way is in bits and pieces chewed slowly, then chewed again.

This revised edition of *The Ministry of Music* addresses only certain bits and pieces of the totality of liturgical music ministry. It takes a specific focus—the paschal mystery as the core of the liturgical rite—and hones in on how communal liturgical singing is meant to enable the rite to make this mystery present and the people to surrender themselves to its transforming power. It further narrows this focus to the singing of the Mass, particularly the Sunday eucharistic celebration.

Chapter 1 lays theological foundations defining liturgy as ritual participation in the paschal mystery, and theoretical foundations describing how liturgical singing facilitates this participation. Chapter 2 explores the theological underpinnings of STL. Chapters 3 through 8 address implications of these theological and theoretical foundations for the ministry of li-

turgical music, exploring the liturgical, pastoral, and musical judgments meant to guide our musical decision-making; the singing of the dialogues and of the acclamations; the role of the responsorial psalm; the singing of the proper entrance and communion chants; and the selecting of vernacular songs for use in the liturgy. Chapters 9 through 11 offer processes for selecting music with the liturgical year in mind, for building a repertoire of seasonal sets of service music, and for choosing a parish music resource. Chapter 12 deals with the relationship between music and silence, with the need for silence in the liturgy, and with pastoral ways to help ourselves and those to whom we minister grow in meeting this need. Chapter 13 presents a paschal mystery spirituality for ministers of music.

What is missing in this small book is readily available in many resources written by other pastoral, liturgical musicians who are teachers and scholars. I am grateful to each of them for their “bits and pieces” as I hope they—and you, the reader of this volume—will be grateful for mine. Bon appétit!

1

Liturgy and the Paschal Mystery

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 6:3-5, NRSV)

The reality of our immersion through baptism in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is at the heart of our Christian identity and of our daily Christian living. It is the central mystery made present every time we gather for liturgical celebration. But what is this mystery of dying and rising in Christ? How do we define it? Where do we encounter it? Most importantly, how do we surrender ourselves to it?

Defining the Paschal Mystery

The paschal mystery is simply the choice to surrender our will to the will of God. Such choice always requires a dying to self, an emptying of self, a giving of self. And it always results in deeper, freer, more redeemed life.

We very easily see this as the mystery of Christ's life, but not so easily as the mystery of our own life. But this is exactly what Paul invites us to see: that the mystery of baptism is precisely the uniting of our dying and rising with that of Christ. The paschal mystery defines our life as much as it defined Christ's. This means that the paschal mystery is not a past event but a present one. The paschal mystery defines the very way we live our lives. We participate with Christ in this mystery and in doing so we collaborate with him in bringing about redemption for the whole world.

We can understand more about this mystery by examining how it was present in Jesus' life. For one thing, the mystery of dying and rising encompassed the entirety of his life, not just the moments of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The mystery encompassed Mary and her *yes* to a very difficult, painful, and challenging request on the part of God. The mystery continued in Jesus' own willingness to be formed by Mary and Joseph in faith, values, and behavior. It was present in his continual encounters with the sick, the suffering, the poor and the hungry, in his struggles and frustrations with his disciples, and in his ongoing confrontations with the Pharisees. In every situation, at every moment, Jesus chose to give himself over so that God's plan of salvation for the world might be fulfilled.

We, too, encounter the paschal mystery most immediately in the ordinary living of daily life, in the ordinary demands of what it means to live consciously as faithful followers of Christ. Often we are not aware of the paschal mystery potential of ordinary daily life because we mistakenly equate the paschal mystery only with dramatic death-resurrection events. But, as we have been pointing out, the mystery of dying to self and rising to new life in Christ is ongoing and ordinary. It comes to us in the faces of family members, in the situations at work, and in the neighbor knocking on our door.

Liturgy as Ritual Participation in the Paschal Mystery

We also encounter the paschal mystery in its ritual enactment in the liturgy. Every time we gather for liturgy we are the

church visibly united in communal surrender to this dying and rising mystery that defines our lives. Within and through the rite we surrender as one body to this redemptive mystery and undergo transformation to deeper identity as Body of Christ and more conscious participation in his mission. In every liturgical celebration God acts to transform us and we surrender to that transformation by choosing to pass through the doorway of death to new life. Christ leads the way through his own act of self-surrender to the mystery of dying and rising. We follow by choosing—fully, actively, consciously—to surrender ourselves to this paschal mystery as it unfolds within the liturgical rite and, by consequence, in the demands of our daily lives.

This understanding of liturgy is revolutionary, for it turns our minds and hearts around. We turn from a limited sense of ourselves as individual persons to awareness of who we are together as Body of Christ. We turn from seeking the self-satisfaction of a “feel-good” liturgy to the self-giving of the paschal mystery. We turn from the mistaken notion that our efforts determine the outcome of the liturgy to the realization that God, who initiates what happens in the ritual and brings about its completion, is the primary actor in the liturgy.

This understanding of liturgy is also radical, for it demands participation from us on the level of our very being. We move through all the doing—the gathering, the processing, the listening, the responding, the singing, the receiving—to becoming more fully who we are: the Body of Christ giving ourselves for the life of the world. Full, conscious, active participation in the liturgy is full, conscious, active participation in the deepest mystery of who we are: the community of the church surrendering ourselves to the paschal mystery.

Liturgical Music and the Paschal Mystery

Grasping that liturgy is ritual enactment of the paschal mystery clarifies our understanding of the role music is meant to play in the liturgy. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy identifies

music as a “necessary or integral part” of the liturgy (112). The role of music, then, is to contribute in a fundamental way to liturgy’s enactment of the paschal mystery. The role of music is to help us surrender to the paschal mystery as it unfolds within the rite. The role of music is not to entertain, not to keep us “interested” when the rite seems dry. The music is not an end in itself but a means to our renewal of identity as Body of Christ. How specifically does music contribute to the liturgical enactment of the paschal mystery? In what way does singing engage us in the mystery of dying and rising in Christ that the liturgy is ritualizing? Part of the answer lies in the nature of music itself. The other part lies in our free choice as members of the assembly.

The Nature of Music

Music is by nature an encounter between force and resistance. This is so because all sound, no matter what its quality, volume, or duration, is the result of a force meeting a resistance—the push of wind against tree leaves, for example, or the striking of hammer against piano strings, or the rush of water against stones in a creek bed. With singing this force-resistance encounter begins where our breath pushes against the vocal folds in our larynx. This is a natural dynamic, one in which we unconsciously engage every time we sing. And it is personal: this is our own body acting out of natural force-resistance mechanisms. Whenever we sing with others, however, the force-resistance dynamic occurring within us also operates *among* us. As our individualized voices struggle to become one voice the force of our own personalities meets the resistance of all the other personalities in the room, and vice versa. All of our resistances to one another—our competitiveness, envy, jealousy, resentment, desire to dominate, and so on—collide with the force of the singing itself calling us beyond self-centeredness to common purpose and common identity.

When our singing together is within the context of the liturgy, this encounter of force and resistance becomes an embodiment of our ritual enactment of the paschal mystery. The force is simply the movement of grace urging us to surrender our resistance

to becoming one body in Christ. There is a dying to self called for here and each time we choose to undergo it, we rise to a new state of consciousness as Body of Christ where all barriers between self and others have been removed. We become Body of Christ united in common force against all the resistances in the human heart that impede the movement of the Spirit toward salvation of the world.

This communal surrender to our identity as Body of Christ does not happen, however, without some resistance on our part, and this is part of the mystery of redemption. Just as there can be no singing without physical resistance in the larynx, so there can be no authentic surrender to the paschal mystery without some resistance on our part. The marvel is that the paschal mystery does not obliterate our resistance to dying to self but uses it to enable the very surrender that is required. Truly life rises from death. And the very activity of our singing together liturgically embodies this mystery and enables this transformation.

Our Free Choice

A second part of the answer to the question about how music enables our ritual enactment of the paschal mystery lies within our own hearts, for to join the liturgical assembly in song is to make a choice. The very choice to sing is a revelation of our personal will and intention to engage with the Body of Christ in the ritual enactment of our dying and rising. None of us ever comes to liturgy without resistance; this is the natural human condition. As pointed out above, this resistance is in fact the very stuff that makes our surrender possible. The call of the liturgy is to do the surrendering and by its very nature communal singing facilitates this choice even while we are resisting it. We may not always be conscious of this movement of surrender to the paschal mystery, but we are often conscious of the sense of release, of “giving over” to something beyond ourselves, which such singing generates.

The more aware we become of liturgical singing as participation in the dying and rising mystery that the liturgy enacts,

the more readily we can allow our singing to facilitate our surrender to this mystery. We will sing, then, not just because we enjoy this particular song or this particular setting of the Mass, but because we want to enter with the assembled church into the dying and rising mystery that marks our identity. Then our communal singing will become a revelation not of the beauty of the music itself, or of the musical capability of this particular community, but of something far deeper: the transformation of this community into the dying and rising Body of Christ.

What we sing in liturgy, then, is our identity as Body of Christ called to paschal mystery living. Liturgical singing, by the power of the dynamics written into its nature, facilitates our entering into this identity. *Why* we sing is so that we may become more fully the Body of Christ open to God's ritual transformation of us, open to one another as members of the church, and open to allowing the paschal mystery to shape our self-understanding and our way of living.