

On Singing at Mass

Part of the study of the Sacred Liturgy includes the study of rubrics. That word comes from the Latin word “*rubra*,” meaning “red.” The instructions on what the priest is supposed to say in the missal (and breviary, and all the liturgical books) are written in black. The instructions on what he is supposed to do are written in red.

There are various books which were published in the old days, that gave extensive instructions to the priests and the faithful on how to apply (and this application was very specific) the rubrics and various instructions of the Holy See to particular situations.

Of these books, the most important in our country was and is for the old Mass, *The Celebration of Mass*, by Rev. J. B. O’Connell. It was published in 1963, and contains all the points of the New General Rubrics of the Code of Rubrics (1960), and the Typical Edition of the Roman Missal (1962), and the Instruction on Sacred Music and Liturgy (1958).

This is the text we use in the Fraternity of St. Peter for solving questions of rubrics in the liturgy, although with adaptation to particular circumstance. Our sanctuary is not configured for the Solemn High Mass for example, so we cannot follow the rubrics exactly. So we have to adapt as best we can to our situation.

For reasons I’ve already stated, the Low Masses shall remain silent. But for the High Masses, the following will be the standard at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (this is taken directly from O’Connell):

1. All stand for the *Asperges*, join in the chant, and sign themselves when sprinkled. The Introit is not sung until the *Asperges* is over and a suitable hymn may be sung or the organ played while the sacred ministers prepare.
2. The Introit is sung by the choir.
3. The faithful sing the *Kyrie* with the choir and after the celebrant intones the *Gloria*, they sing the *Gloria* with the choir.
4. The faithful sing the *Et cum spiritu tuo* and the *Amen* at the end of the Collect.
5. They answer *Et cum spiritu tuo* and *Gloria tibi, Domine* at the Gospel.
6. They sing the Creed with the choir, after it has been intoned by the celebrant.
7. They sing the *Et cum spiritu tuo* after the celebrant has sung the *Oremus*.
8. They sing the *Amen*, the *Et cum spiritu tuo*, the *Habemus ad Dominum*, and the *Vere dignum et justum est* at the Preface of the Mass. After the choir has intoned the *Sanctus*, they join in the singing.
9. At the end of the Canon all chant the *Amen*, and sing the *Sed libera nos a malo* after the *Pater*, and the *Amen* and *Et cum spiritu tuo* in reply to the *Pax Domini*.
10. All sing the Agnus Dei in its entirety.
11. All recite the *Domine non sum dignus* with the celebrant before Holy Communion is distributed (this is the only part which the faithful recite in the Mass).
12. They sing the *Et cum spiritu tuo* and *Amen* at the end of the *Postcommunion*.
13. They sing the *Et cum spiritu tuo* once more, and the *Deo Gratias* after the priest or deacon has sung the *Ite missa est* (or *Benedicamus Domino*).

In order to facilitate this congregational singing, for some time we will use Mass VIII, or the Mass of the Angels. This is because it is the most widely known Mass, and because many of you already have the music in your missals. If you do not, then that Mass may be found in the back of the red missalettes. Credo III will be used regularly, which is also in most missals and the missalettes.

While this will become the norm for all Sung Masses here, it does not mean the end of polyphony, which is a great blessing. So for special occasions, if you hear anything from the *Asperges* to the *Agnus Dei* being sung in polyphony, then obviously it is proper to let the choir sing in polyphony.

We do not have a hymnal. They are rather expensive, and I’m more interested in putting together our own hymnal, since many of the vernacular hymns (e.g., Holy God We Praise Thy Name) are in the public domain, and we could publish the words and melody without copyright infringement.

Our hymnal would have about 30 good English hymns, especially for processions and recessions for the Mass, and some for Benediction or other devotions (vernacular hymnody is not used during the Mass). It will take some time to put this together, but it should be done sometime in this academic year.

The singing will begin Sunday, September 30, at the 11:00 a.m. Mass.

No one is forced to sing, but it is the expectation of Holy Mother Church that the faithful do sing, if they are able.

Now if someone chooses not to sing—for whatever reason—they are not to be corrected. It is understood by the Church that there are some who cannot read and some who cannot sing for physical reasons, and there are some who cannot sing because of emotional reasons. There are times in our lives when we come to Mass and can hardly speak, whether from grief at the loss of a loved one, or because we are so interiorly awestruck at the mystery of God that we can hardly move, much less make sound.

I ask then that all our parishioners who attend the Sung Masses would participate by their singing, as of September 30th. Gregorian chant is a magnificent treasure and a great gift from God. May we sing it well, and by so doing “pray twice.”