

Time to reflect August 2020

To sing or not to sing?

Cast your mind back to Palm Sunday this year.

On that occasion, the beginning of Holy Week, the only three people involved in the liturgy were Archbishop Bernard, Fr Dominic and me (Fr Timothy).

From Holy Thursday we began using the organ for Masses which enhanced our worship throughout Eastertide.

In June, we were able to have a single cantor to lead us in singing.

And then, there was the strange dilemma of whether or not to cease singing, because the guidelines for public worship are: one singer only.

Is it fair to expect people to come to a Mass with music and not to sing?

There are some people who don't sing but appreciate music.

And there are some people who would happily see music removed from Mass altogether.

But in the life of the Church, music is not an optional extra. It is integral to the celebration of Mass, and if we hold onto the word celebration – which we use in good times and bad to describe the Church's worship – then you seldom take part in a celebration in any setting without music.

In the document on Music in the Liturgy which came from the Second Vatican Council in 1967 *Musica Sacram* the purpose of music in the liturgy is rich and clear:

Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, ... and the people participating in it.

Indeed, through this form, prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.

And much more recently, when the revised translation of the Roman Missal was given to us in 2011, the Bishops of England and Wales wrote in *Celebrating the Mass*:

Music is integral to every liturgical celebration. Not every liturgy, however, is celebrated with the same degree of solemnity. Sundays and Solemnities enjoy pride of place and demand greater preparation. Other celebrations are planned in the light of the community's needs and resources.

So, at St Chad's, we took the decision that with the greater number of people 'attending' Sunday Mass virtually, those who come to the Cathedral now make a small sacrifice to be recipients of the music, so that those worshipping from home can continue to participate in song as they have done since at least Easter Sunday with a participation sheet.

You might notice one or two ways in which music is used differently depending on whether Mass is livestreamed only or with a congregation present in the Cathedral:

If there is a congregation present who are not permitted to sing under present guidelines (and hopefully these will change in due course) then the Gospel Acclamation is generally omitted. This

follows an established norm which states that if the Gospel acclamation is not sung, it may be omitted. Similarly, the doxology at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer might be said rather than sung, inviting a said 'Amen' from those present in the Cathedral.

Please pray for our Cathedral choir and all those involved in Church music in our Archdiocese. These are lean times for Church music as it is for the arts in general.

Let us remember the words attributed to St Augustine of Hippo in the 4th century: the one who sings, prays twice. And those who are permitted to participate from home with the singing at the Sunday 12 noon Mass...please sing your heart out. Because you can!