

Friday, 28 September 2018 – Rite of Christian Burial

Growing up as a kid, my mum was one of the biggest Seekers fans you can imagine. So to this day, the Seekers and Judith Durham are one of my favourite bands...and I remember, probably about 17 years ago now, the first time I encountered that First Reading from Ecclesiastes during weekday Mass, my first thought was: "Wow - the Seekers inspired that passage of Scripture!" (I always did get my dates confused in history!). I then remembered how old the Bible is. Ah ... in fact, the Seekers were inspired by that passage of Scripture! It amazes me how that reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes does not appear out of all the texts of the Bible that are suggested in the Rite of Christian Burial. Although the list of 300 Scriptural texts is vast, it is not exclusive. The Rite of Christian Burial allows for other texts to be used, provided they come from the Bible. Secular poems and writings can never be used as a substitute for the Scriptural texts in a Catholic funeral...and that reading from Ecclesiastes is one of the texts that keeps on cropping up at funerals - even though it does not appear in the list of 300 readings recommended by the Rite. It's a beautiful, powerful reading, depicting our life as a series of changing seasons, and it reminds us that the one true constant in our lives is God, and his love for us. God's love for us is the one, true, unchanging constant amidst the changing seasons of our lives. I remember recently, a family asking me if they could play the Seekers' song 'Turn, Turn, Turn' on a CD at a funeral. Although the song is based on the text from Ecclesiastes, I recommended against its use in a Catholic liturgy...and I did so for a number of reasons.

Firstly, under the 1917 Code of Canon Law, recorded music was absolutely forbidden to be used in a Catholic Liturgy in a Catholic Church - the reason being that we're meant to praise and glorify God with our whole being, including our singing voices. As St Augustine

wrote, "the one who sings, praises God twice". "Canned" CD music robs us of that dynamic of praising God through our singing voices. (It's interesting to note that overhead projector screens were also banned from use in Churches under the 1917 Code, for exactly the same reason, as we're meant to be actively praising God, not passively watching screens or listening to taped music). The Church expresses great practical wisdom in her laws and traditions.

The second argument I used with the family was to explain what a religious hymn is. There were three criteria I used to define this.

- Firstly: the music must use less than all eight notes in an octave. The reason being - most congregations are made up of untrained singers (I lump myself under that category - an untrained singer), and most untrained singers cannot hit all eight notes in an octave. And it's interesting to see that the traditional hymns of the 1800 to 1900s do not use all eight notes of the octave, whereas the modern "noise" that people push forward as music tends to use two or three octaves in its composition. So most people (untrained singers) cannot sing along with modern Church music. (A hymn should be something that some, most, or all of the congregation should be able to sing along with).

- The second criteria ... a hymn must be theologically sound ... it must communicate the truths of the Catholic faith. Compare, for instance, Blessed John Henry Newman's "Firmly, I believe and truly, God is Three and God is One, and I next acknowledge duly, Manhood taken by the Son". That is profound theology! Now compare it with Hillsong's: "Shine Jesus shine" - The theological meaning ... Our Lord Jesus Christ is a lightbulb?! The song "Come as you are" is popularly interpreted as "Remain as you are" which is how most baptised Catholics today answer Christ's call to: "Repent and believe in the Gospel." They answer that call by

REMAINING as they are – by remaining in their lives separated from God. So, a hymn must be theologically sound; it must clearly convey a Catholic understanding of God and his Church.

- The third criteria I used was that the song must be aesthetically pleasing - there must be that sense of beauty to it. After all, when we sing, we are praising the God who is the source and fount of all beauty. This is perhaps the hardest of the criteria to judge, because most times "beauty is in the eye [or the ear] of the beholder".

Listening to the criteria, and the long-standing tradition of the Catholic Church, I'm glad to say that the family decided upon other music for the funeral. But it's also important for Catholics to be reminded that the number one, top priority of Church music authorised by the reforms of Vatican II is GREGORIAN CHANT. To this day, Gregorian Chant (chanting in Latin) is the Church's number one preference in Liturgical music. (How on earth people interpret that "The Church abolished Latin in Vatican II", I will never know!).

I commend Jess (our young organist) for her work when she's filling in for the 11am Mass on Sunday - Jess will introduce some Gregorian Chant... just to remind Catholics that this is actually the Church's preference of liturgical music. As I've said many times before, there is a basic understanding of Catholic faith that is not being communicated anywhere today. Strengthened through the celebration of the Eucharist here today, let us exert ourselves to continually deepen and grow in our understanding and practice of the Catholic faith, so that we can continually deepen and grow in our love of God.

Fr KW.

Friday 22 November 2019 – St Cecilia

Today, we have the Memorial of St Cecilia, one of the ancient Saints of the Church, a young woman, Virgin and Martyr. Somewhere along the line, St Cecilia has been adopted as the Patron Saint of Music and Musicians, especially Church Music, so I will spend a bit of time today talking about the importance of music in the Liturgy.

According to the Reforms of Vatican II, **Gregorian Chant** is to be given “pride of place in liturgical services” (*Sacrosanctum concilium 16*). So the Church’s preference for Church music, following the Reforms of Vatican II is for **Gregorian Chant** - not for hymns. You wouldn’t know that looking about Australia today!

The reason why I drew that to your attention is that Jess, who was the Organist here for a while, was starting to introduce Gregorian Chant to the Liturgy here at St Joseph’s, and some parishioners, at both the 9.30am and 11am Masses, **took her to task about it**. They criticised her, which is one of the reasons why Jess stepped out of the music ministry here. The sad truth is that the parishioners were attacking Jess **for doing exactly what the Church expects her to do**. Gregorian Chant is meant to be given “pride of place” in the Church’s liturgy. I hope that one day, Jess will return to us here as Organist...and anyone who states that Latin was “abolished” in Vatican II has obviously never read the documents of the Ecumenical Council - Gregorian Chant almost exclusively only exists in Latin!

Second point from the Reforms of Vatican II: “The Pipe Organ is to be held in high esteem in the Latin Church (*Sacrosanctum concilium 120*), so just like the Church’s preference for Church music is Gregorian Chant, the Church’s preference for musical instruments is the PIPE ORGAN. Reading further...”Other instruments **may be admitted** for use in divine worship...this may be done only on the condition that the instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use...that they accord with the dignity of the

temple". So, the Church's preference for musical instruments is for the Pipe Organ. If other instruments are to be used, on occasion, they are to be suitable **noble** instruments for sacred use. Prior to coming here at St Joseph's, I would have argued that the guitar is **not** a suitably noble instrument for Church use – I love guitars, but not in the Liturgy. That's what I would have argued prior to coming here to St Joseph's...then I heard Kevin play in the liturgy, and I would now argue: "the guitar **may be used**"...provided it is played well – and Kevin certainly does that!

The final point I will raise today is the **realm** of Church music – it is one on which we desperately need the Bishops to give us **clear guidance and strict guidelines**. At weddings and funerals, families want to keep on shoving secular music into the Liturgy, even though it is **not appropriate** to use secular music in the Church liturgical setting. In addition, Protestant hymns keep on appearing in the Liturgy, even though the theology of these hymns is not in accordance with Catholic faith or teaching. I remember one song, I thought it was "What a friend we have in Jesus" but apparently not! It spoke specifically about the **rapture**, which is **not Catholic theology**...and it is not **harmonious** with Catholic theology. No wonder, Catholics are so confused about their faith today, when we keep on shoving Protestant hymns and Protestant theology into a Catholic liturgy...although I will say, in the 18 to 1900s, Catholic writers "tweaked" the wording of some Protestant hymns, making them suitable for Catholic worship - "Alleluia, sing to Jesus" and "Abide with Me" are examples of that, but not all Protestant hymns have been "tweaked" for Catholic worship.

In addition, a lot of modern music that is used in the Church is **ambiguous**. Take "You Raise me up" or "The Wind beneath my wings" – their author could be singing about God, or they could be singing about another human being who really inspires them. There is no explicit mention of God anywhere in that piece of music - a subtle shift in any culture today to kick God out of our minds, hearts and lives - Christian-flavoured humanism at its worst!

There is so much more that should be said, but it would be too much for you now! So, strengthened through the celebration of the Eucharist here today, let us ask for the intercession of St Cecilia that there will be a “cleansing out of the Temple” in regards to modern Church music, so that the people of God can truly raise their hearts and minds to God **in prayer.**

FR KW