

First, let me say that as an associate pastor I have no practical control over the Sunday Mass music done at my parish other than singing the Order of Mass at the Masses I celebrate. Our parish is fairly typical with OCP hymns/songs replacing propers, mostly modern styles of music (1970s and later) for hymns and Ordinary, and chant ordinaries during Advent and Lent (that may or may not sound like chant depending upon the musicians' own styles). I will on occasion for weekday feasts chant the entrance and communion propers from SEP or Fr. Weber. I just put this out there because I don't think my situation is much different from many places when it comes to hymns/songs.

I do think that hymns and other religious songs have an important part in our faith life, especially in personal devotion. During college I found a number of contemporary Christian and Catholic songs to be supportive of my growth in the faith. Recently, I have been enjoying discovering the "treasury" of Latin hymnody through Fr. Weber's English translations in his *Hymnal for the Hours* (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 93). Often hymns will be a part of my personal prayer or I might spend some time just singing hymns that I like as a way of relieving stress.

As for hymns in the liturgy, we know that historically hymns have an important role in the Divine Office. (See the excellent Forward by Cardinal Burke in Fr. Weber's *Hymnal for the Hours*.) Hymns in the Divine Office create

"the particular quality of the Hour or individual feast, more so than other parts of the Office, and are able to move mind and heart to devotion, a power frequently enhanced by their beauty of style" (*General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* 173).

The Church has always remained vigilant in what hymns were admitted into the liturgy, especially since through hymns heretical ideas were sometimes spread (ex: Gnosticism and Arianism). So hymns gained the important, though limited, use in the Divine Office, but not as much at Mass, though we do find some chant-style hymns in the Roman Missal and Lectionary, for example the sequences and some hymns during Holy Week.

Having studied many of the Church's documents I have to conclude that **the hymns used at the propers are not the texts of the Mass itself, but that they do have value when sung at Mass.** Pope Pius XII talked about hymns within the context of the participation of the faithful at Mass. First, he considers that our primary participation is internal – the offering of ourselves with Christ to the Father (*Mediator Dei* 78, 80). He then commends helping the people to pray the words of the Mass itself:

"They are to be praised who, with the idea of getting the Christian people to take part more easily and more fruitfully in the Mass, strive to make them familiar with the "Roman Missal," so that the faithful, united with the priest, may pray together in the very words and sentiments of the Church. ..." (*Mediator Dei* 105)

Then he looks to exterior participation:

"... They also are to be commended who strive to make the liturgy even in an external way a sacred act in which all who are present may share. This can be

done in more than one way, when, for instance, the whole congregation, in accordance with the rules of the liturgy, either answer the priest in an orderly and fitting manner, or sing hymns suitable to the different parts of the Mass, or do both, or finally in high Masses when they answer the prayers of the minister of Jesus Christ and also sing the liturgical chant.” (*Mediator Dei* 105)

Finally he speaks of other ways, not officially a part of Mass, that may still assist someone to participate fruitfully at Mass:

“So varied and diverse are men’s talents and characters that it is impossible for all to be moved and attracted to the same extent by community prayers, hymns and liturgical services. Moreover, the needs and inclinations of all are not the same, nor are they always constant in the same individual. Who, then, would say, on account of such a prejudice, that all these Christians cannot participate in the Mass nor share its fruits? On the contrary, they can adopt some other method which proves easier for certain people; for instance, they can lovingly meditate on the mysteries of Jesus Christ or perform other exercises of piety or recite prayers which, though they differ from the sacred rites, are still essentially in harmony with them.” (*Mediator Dei* 108)

From this, it would seem that whether or not hymns are part of the official text of the liturgy, they can be means of participation. Further documents will confirm this.

Prior to Vatican II, hymns that had entered the Mass via local custom were allowed to remain in the solemn liturgy as long as they did not replace the texts of the Mass (*Musicae sacrae disciplina* 47). At Low Mass, the faithful could participate directly by reciting the texts that belong to them, but could also “in addition to this direct participation” (perhaps by indirect participation) sing vernacular hymns (*De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* 14b). These hymns at Low Masses

“can be a powerful aid in keeping the faithful from attending the Holy Sacrifice like dumb and idle spectators. They can help to make the faithful accompany the sacred services both mentally and vocally and to join their own piety to the prayers of the priest. This happens when these hymns are properly adapted to the individual parts of the Mass, as We rejoice to know is being done in many parts of the Catholic world.” (*Musicae sacrae disciplina* 64)

These hymns, of course, were “in addition to” the direct participation of saying the texts of the Mass. The distinction between hymns at Low Mass and the Proper of the Mass is quite clear (*De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* 30-31). Already prior to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 112, chant is seen as integral to the liturgy, compared to hymns which are not integral but may be admitted as already said:

“Sacred music, and the liturgy are intimately bound together; sacred chant forms an integral part of the liturgy, while hymns are used to a great extent in private

devotions, and at times even during liturgical functions themselves” (*De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* 104).

Vatican II said nothing new with regard to hymns at Mass. Hymns are mentioned in the context of the Divine Office as well as when speaking of fostering participation at Mass through singing:

“It should first of all include acclamations, responses to the greetings of the priest and ministers and to the prayers of litanies, and also antiphons and psalms, refrains or repeated responses, hymns and canticles.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 93, 16; *Musicam sacram* 16a).

In the list we see the Order of Mass listed first, next the “antiphons and psalms” of the Proper, and lastly the hymns/canticles. The instruction *Musicam sacram* gives the first indication that the music of the Proper (contained in the *Graduale*) may be replaced with other settings. It is not clear if this also means the texts of the Proper may also be replaced with other texts. I would say it likely does intend to allow texts to be replaced if one understands the “legitimate customs” of “substituting other songs” as including hymns:

“The custom legitimately in use in certain places and widely confirmed by indulgence, of substituting other songs for the songs given in the Graduale for the Entrance, Offertory and Communion, can be retained according to the judgment of the competent territorial authority, as long as songs of this sort are in keeping with the parts of the Mass, with the feast or with the liturgical season. It is for the same territorial authority to approve the texts of these songs.

“It is desirable that the assembly of the faithful should participate in the songs of the Proper as much as possible, especially through simple responses and other suitable settings.

“The song after the lessons, be it in the form of gradual or responsorial psalm, has a special importance among the songs of the Proper. By its very nature, it forms part of the Liturgy, of the Word. It should be performed with all seated and listening to it—and, what is more, participating in it as far as possible.” (*Musicam sacram* 32-33)

So it seems that the proper texts may be replaced as long as the substituted songs are “in keeping with the parts of the Mass, with the feast or with the liturgical season.” It is not exactly clear to me what this means. Does it mean simply the content of the songs should match the day that is being celebrated, or is the form of the music important too, as Pope Pius X wrote:

“The different parts of the mass and the Office must retain, even musically, that particular concept and form which ecclesiastical tradition has assigned to them, and which is admirably brought out by Gregorian Chant. The method of composing an introit, a gradual, an antiphon, a psalm, a hymn, a Gloria in excelsis, etc., must therefore be distinct from one another.” (*Tra le sollicitudini* 10)

Hymns are then more explicitly allowed to replace the text of the Propers at Mass in the Ordinary Form, according to the norms in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (See below). But is this allowance meant to be taken as the standard?

The Roman Missal simply refers to these propers as the Entrance Chant, Offertory Chant, and Communion Chant (*Roman Missal 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.*, The Order of Mass, 1, 21, 136). The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* gives more specifics, giving four options (GIRM 2011, 48):

“This chant is sung alternately by the choir and the people or similarly by a cantor and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone. In the Dioceses of the United States of America, there are four options for the Entrance Chant:

1. the antiphon from the Missal or the antiphon with its Psalm from the *Graduale Romanum*, as set to music there or in another setting;
2. the antiphon and Psalm of the *Graduale Simplex* for the liturgical time;
3. a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms;
4. another liturgical chant that is suited to the sacred action, the day, or the time of year, similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.”

The word “chant” (*cantus*) does not exclude hymns (USCCB Committee on Divine Worship Newsletter January 2012, *Seven Questions on the Implementing the Roman Missal, Third Edition*, Question 1). The ordering of the options does seem to indicate hierarchical preference. To be preferred is the official text, music, and form taken from the *Missal* or *Graduale*. Next, option two, the *Graduale Simplex*, does change the text and music, but retains the form of an antiphon and psalm. Option three might either retain the text while changing the music or change both text and music, while retaining the form of antiphon and psalm. When a hymn is used under option four the text, music, and form are all changed.

Now I suppose someone could argue that there is no hierarchy of preference and the four options are of equal merit, so it is perfectly fine to always choose option four. It is true that to always choose option four is allowed, but I find it very difficult to believe that this is the vision of the Church. For example, I cannot accept that option four is on equal par with option one. Here is why: Option one consists of the texts given by the Church. The texts of the antiphons are usually verses of Sacred Scripture. Some may be slightly adapted Scripture verses, and there are a few that are biblically based but not direct quotes. The psalm verses are Sacred Scripture. It is possible for the first three options to use the texts given by the Church which are, by and large, simply Sacred Scripture. Option four songs, on the other hand, are at best paraphrases of Scripture, poetic elaborations on a biblical passage or theme, or it may even be difficult to discern a biblical reference. Options 1-3 have the possibility of simply singing the divinely inspired word of God itself, while option 4 will almost always be poetry – perhaps very good at times, but not part of the divinely inspired canon of Sacred Scripture. This alone is convincing

enough for me that option four is not on equal par with the texts the Church gives, simply because of the reverence the Church gives to the written Word of God. That is why I will say that when one sings other songs in place of the proper texts, while allowed, one is singing at Mass, rather than singing the Mass.

A year or so ago I was putting together a presentation <http://youtu.be/CzKXuUIEEVc> on the psalms and I realized that the place where the psalms are prayed at Mass are in the Proper. If those texts of the psalms are replaced by option four songs Sunday after Sunday, then the faithful's prayer of the psalms will be incredibly impoverished. Their only encounter with Christ through the psalms may be in the Responsorial Psalm, since few parishes offer the Liturgy of the Hours where the liturgical action is the praying of the psalms themselves. Whenever I see the words of Sacred Scripture replaced by our own compositions it breaks my heart. Is not the Bible itself good enough? How can I be so audacious as to think my own words could take the place of the Word of God?! We think God never speaks to us? Let us for a moment stop speaking our own words to him, and let him speak his words to us.

### **So what practically could we do with congregational hymn singing and the Church's vision of the sung Mass?**

Most importantly the pastor must be on board, for it must start with singing the Order of Mass, which cannot be done without the priest. And not just singing the Order of Mass to any music we feel like, but the desire to sing what the Church has given for the tones, as found in the Roman Missal. These simple chants with limited tonal ranges musically imitate the evangelical councils of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They have a "tonal poverty" being limited to only a few different notes. With regard to chastity, these simple tones abstain from drawing attention to themselves. By singing them, I am not trying to draw attention to my own singing abilities but elevating the words of the prayers themselves. 'Chaste' singing does not seek "to entertain, to charm, or to possess." Singing these also forms us in obedience. First, obedience to the sacred text, obeying "the natural accents and verbal harmonics of the inspired Word of God, embracing it, espousing it, and remaining within the limits that it defines." (*The Psalmody of the Divine Office: A Path to Holiness for the Apostolic Religious* by Dom Mark Daniel Kirby, O.S.B., Sacred Music, Spring 2011) Second, it shows obedience to the Church in little things, saying "The Mass does not belong to me; I will defer to the wisdom of Mother Church who has been around much longer than myself." Singing this Order of Mass over time certainly does help form the evangelical councils. One parishioner was not afraid to voice his dislike of my singing the Mass, but over time I have noticed his attitude change. A kind of obedience has formed within him, not so much to the point that he loves the chant, but he appreciates it. Starting from the point of judging and wanting to change/remove the chant, the chant has ended up changing him. While the evangelical councils are lived out in a particular way by consecrated religious, they also proposed by Christ to all his disciples to inform them how to "strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state." (*Lumen Gentium* 42, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 915)

Also the priest must teach his people how to actively participate at Mass, which is still often misunderstood. Without going into a thorough analysis, there are a number of principles that can be derived from numerous Church documents:

1. Full active and conscious participation must primarily be interior. The faithful uniting themselves to the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ, offering their whole lives with Jesus to the Father. The action of the liturgy is primarily that of God, so for us to participate we must be united with our Lord.
2. The participation of those present becomes fuller (*plenior*) if internal attention is joined to external participation, expressed by external actions such as the position of the body (genuflecting, standing, sitting), ceremonial gestures, the responses, prayers and singing.
3. Perfect participation of the faithful is obtained when there is added sacramental participation (by receiving Communion).
4. Deliberate active participation of the faithful is not possible without their adequate instruction. One needs to know how to participate before one can do so.
5. Participation is “hierarchical,” meaning that at different points throughout the liturgy the different people (priest, deacon, choir, congregation, etc.) have different roles. This is particularly true with the external participation, not everyone says/sings every part nor does every action.

(See *Tra le sollicitudini* 1, 3, 7, 11; *Divini cultus*; *Mediator Dei* 78, 80, 108; *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* 22, 23; *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 14, 19, 21, 27, 30, 48; *Musicam Sacram* 5, 9, 15-19)

It is important to note that participation does not mean that every person present must say or sing absolutely everything in the liturgy. We each have our own external parts that are meant to aid the internal participation of uniting ourselves with Christ in our gift to the Father. For example, the proper participation of the congregation during the proclamation of the Gospel is their active listening to the proclamation of the Word of God. Simply because it is only the deacon or priest who speaks the words aloud, does not preclude all from actively participating at that moment. In fact if everyone were to recite the readings together, it would likely decrease the internal participation as one focused on the simultaneous declaration of the words but perhaps not really hear them. This can be the danger at times with the external participation of those with specific liturgical roles (usher, EMHC, lector, choir, even priest!).

For example, I have seen ushers so distracted by their role at Mass as to enter into long conversations and even read the bulletin during the homily. Having sung in the seminary choir I know how easy it is to be distracted from internal participation as one focuses on leading the music. Even as priests we can go into “autopilot” and say all the words but forget that we are *in persona Christi Capitis* offering the sacrifice in the name of all his members, uniting the self-offering of the lay faithful, their living sacrifice, to the offering of Christ. (*Mediator Dei* 92-93, *Lumen Gentium* 10, 28) Hopefully we all have had experiences of true internal participation.

For example, not long ago I preached on the anointing of the sick and had in the first pew a young family where the mother who was fighting cancer had recently gone on hospice. Knowing how her family was going through what I had just spoken of, they and others in the parish in similar situations were on the forefront of my mind as I prayed the Eucharistic Prayer, certainly affecting how I prayed it. Sometime after Mass I had an entirely different parishioner, who did not even know of that family's situation, tell me that that Mass felt different, she had experienced profoundly God's grace through that Mass. Now that is active participation!

Applying participation of the faithful to the Proper of the Mass, we can take the beautiful analysis of Dr. William Mahrt in *The Musical Shape of the Liturgy*. The Gregorian melodies seem to indicate that the true participation of the faithful during the proper is not primarily to sing them. For example for the introit, the priest participates by processing and incensing the altar, the choir sings the introit, and the people are to witness the procession. They should see the colors of the vestments and the hierarchical order, be moved by the rhythmic quality of the actions to contemplate the order being projected, which is a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. It helps them turn to the important 'something' that is about to happen, and by it the congregation can be thought of as virtually included in the procession. We should not be surprised to see John Paul II's words:

“Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it. Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active. In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty.” (*Ad Limina Address of Pope John Paul II to Bishops of the United States On Active Participation in the Liturgy*, October 9, 1998)

The idea that participation is hierarchical, that not all ought to be expected to say or sing everything, gives a greater freedom to participate at Mass. This takes the pressure off the musicians and music directors: they should not have to feel it is their job to coax singing out of the congregation. Those who like to sing will sing, those who don't will not. One need not sing everything in order to actively participate at Mass. Depending upon which sources one uses for propers (Graduale, SEP, Lumen Christi, Weber, etc.), this will determine the amount one might expect the faithful to sing for those propers.

Having noted the faithful can fully participate in the Propers without themselves singing every word of them, we should not fall into the extreme that congregational singing of hymns have no place at all. To do so would be to ignore the Church's documents already quoted above that encourage hymns as a means of participation (*Mediator Dei* 108, *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* 14b, *Musicae sacrae disciplina* 64). According to the three degrees given in *Musicam sacram*, one can have a Sung Mass following the first degree regardless of what is being sung in

the second and third degrees. If the first degree is sung, the texts of the prayers of the Mass are being sung. If one uses hymns to replace the Proper of Mass, it is true that those texts of the Mass are not being sung and so in those moments one is singing at Mass rather than singing the Mass. I think it would be preferable not to replace the proper texts, but sing hymns in addition to them. So, for example, a hymn might be done prior to the entrance chant, after the offertory or communion chant, and after the dismissal. Of course this would depend upon time, since these three propers accompany liturgical action and should finish as the liturgical action is finished.

When I was at Conception Seminary I was introduced to proper-like antiphons with psalm verses sometimes used during communion time. Everyone was to sing the antiphon and listen to the psalm verses. It was quite the prayerful experience since you would stop singing and listen and pray, an increase in interior participation. Even though the congregation sings less, there was even an increase in exterior participation, for it was not as imposing as a hymn in which one is expected to sing every word. Seminarians tend to like to be quiet and pray after communion and would not always respond to sing the hymn, while the antiphons allowed one to sing a little but also have the quiet. I still have some of those wonderful Scriptural antiphons stuck in my mind.

One advantage of singing the Mass by singing the texts of the propers is that it helps one side-step the issue of musical style. Much energy has been lost, and little consensus reached in arguments as to which songs stylistically belong at Mass. Using the Scriptural texts of the proper without alteration often rules out certain styles of music that would necessitate modifying the text to fit the music. On the other hand, arguments over which styles of music to use at Mass often come down to personal preferences more than church teaching. For example, those who grew up with 1970s and 1980s folk music tend to still use this style in their liturgies today. I understand they do this because this what they know, often having a personal emotional attachment, a nostalgia. But insisting upon music from these decades becomes a disconnect for those who have no lived experience of that period of time. It makes the Mass, indeed the faith, appear outdated, so we should not be surprised that many of our youth find that music uninteresting and Mass boring. Should the solution be to update the music to the current popular style? But then those who like past styles and have no love of the music of today's youth will be dissatisfied. It would be unreasonable and ultimately unsuccessful for the priest to base the way he celebrates Mass on the personal likes and dislikes of the people, for he cannot appeal to all. He must have a more universal criterion for making that determination – the vision the Church has for the liturgy and its music. What vision does the Church have for the liturgy's musical style? The vision has remained consistent from St. Pope Pius X to St. Pope John Paul II:

“With regard to compositions of liturgical music, I make my own the ‘general rule’ that St. Pius X formulated in these words: ‘The more closely a composition for church approaches in its movement, inspiration and savour the Gregorian melodic form, the more sacred and liturgical it becomes; and the more out of harmony it is with that supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple’”  
(*Chirograph for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio “Tra le sollecitudini” on Sacred Music* 12 quoting *Tra le sollecitudini* 3)



The musical style of chant more easily can be conformed to the sacred texts to become “sacred song united to the words” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 112). Which is one reason why every pre- and post-conciliar document on sacred music encourages chant as the music uniquely her own and suited for sacred liturgy. “Going back” to chant does not have the same result as other styles do, making the music feel outdated. Rather the qualities of chant give the music a timelessness. It is not so much that old music is better than new music, but that the music must evoke eternity not a single time period. Thus John Paul II continues the above quote explaining that:

It is not, of course, a question of imitating Gregorian chant but rather of ensuring that new compositions are imbued with the same spirit that inspired and little by little came to shape it. Only an artist who is profoundly steeped in the *sensus Ecclesiae* can attempt to perceive and express in melody the truth of the Mystery that is celebrated in the Liturgy.” (*Chirograph for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio “Tra le sollecitudini” on Sacred Music* 12)

Chesterton’s famous quote about Christianity in general seems also to apply to the music uniquely her own: “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” (G.K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*)

Here in my own Archdiocese we have been given a Core Repertoire that represents a first step toward raising the quality of music in our diocese to be closer to what the Church intends (<http://sites.google.com/site/parishchant/archomaha>). This Core Repertoire is not meant to limit what may be sung at parishes, but be an authentic example of what the Church universally desires for each parish. The Repertoire contains the following:

1. Two Mass Ordinaries, both in chant style.
2. Fourteen antiphons with psalm verses to be used *ad libitum* during Entrance, Offertory, and Communion processions. These follow the form of the antiphon and psalm of the propers and are short enough to allow congregational participation in the singing. The texts are taken from selected propers through the year.
3. Three funeral antiphons and psalms using the texts taken from the Funeral Rites (*Order of Christian Funerals* 403, 176). These follow the form of the antiphon and psalm of the propers and are short enough to allow congregational participation in the singing.
4. List of 78 core hymns. 88% of these hymns were written prior to Vatican II. (While 70% of the songs in OCP *Breaking Bread, 2013* were written after Vatican II, this missalette does contain 91% of this core list, so it depends how you use it. In 2012 our parish was using only 31% of the core hymns, while 60% came from the 1960s through the 1990s.)

In general, one can see the desire to foster three things from the contents of this diocese-wide Core Repertoire: 1) to use chant 2) to sing the Scriptural propers of the Mass using the antiphon/psalm form 3) to discern and use higher quality hymns. This Repertoire is a recent development for the diocese so as of yet implementation in our parish has been limited.