

Music, the Servant of Prayer

Part I
By Sister M. Florian Reichert

No doubt the title of this article could be "Music that Prays" or "Music, an Aid to Prayer." In any case, it needs clarification. Certainly there are hymns that are prayers — but what needs to be explored is the real ministerial function of music or its relationship to prayer — Music, the servant of prayer.

What is meant when we speak of music as servant? To serve is to minister unto. Ministry is service rendered out of love and with deep respect for the person served. It is never self-seeking. Rather, it is a self-giving in which one loves the persons one gives to: This service is meant to bring joy and peace; to share what enriches with deep respect for the individuals served — their personalities and tastes — no matter how erroneous or preconceived. To serve is to urge, support, inspire, share with, to aid growth without ever forcing conformity. The church musician, with her or his God-given gifts and talents of music serves and aids the prayer of the faith-community as it celebrates Christ. This person is a minister of music.

Music is primarily a communication art. It has been called the "universal language." Any communication is a sharing — an act of love — and if communication is good, true and beautiful, it is a greater act of love. Music is just this kind of communication, and because of

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its communal nature, it is a pre-eminent sign of celebration. All hear its sounds; it generates a common mood or spirit; it fosters reflective thought and feelings; it is the expression of that which is at the heart of life. Music which is creative, flexible but always true and beautiful conjures up vivid imagery of life experiences. It is the focus of hope. Good church music serves the prayer-experiences of the people of God and although it can defy verbalization it gives expression to the community at prayer; it is the servant of prayer. This servant-role gives it its unique dignity, its precise value. A celebration is surely somewhat deficient if it is music-less. What other art can so effectively create unity or so effectively gather a group, a community together? Once music becomes master it loses its reason for being. If in the liturgy it becomes entertainment it fails in its servant-role.

Few words can do justice to this experience while endless chatter often ruins it. Music can evoke such prayer, express it, share it. Prayer is often defined as conversation, verbalization. God speaks through his dealings with his people recorded in Scripture, through his prophets, through Jesus his Son, through our brothers and sisters in prayer with us today. We listen, we respond. Music serves such dialogue.

To plan a music program for worship, therefore, we must know and must have experienced prayer. Otherwise we cannot know the real need of the praying community we serve. To call people to praise through music, to expect to choose apt music, without ever trying to pray in a community is like trying to work out a training program for a quarterback when you've never watched a football game.

Now, if music is the servant of prayer, we must consider what prayer is. The basic experience of prayer is to stand before the Lord in wonder and praise; to let him become real. Once we reflect on his presence in our lives we are praying. It takes time; it takes peace and undisturbed attention.

To summarize, we have treated worship music from the standpoint of its being true music and how it serves prayer. Our modern sensitivity to integrity, openness, truth and our widespread desire for community very much needs what the U.S. Bishops committee calls a "celebration theology." The more worship music becomes an act of the human person, — knowing, choosing, loving, praising, suffering — so much the more is it community action. This expression of our humanness is best done in sign or symbol: in words that are heard, communicated, interpreted, enhanced; in gestures or movement such as the way the celebrant or a procession moves, or the way people stand and are seated or dance or carry the book. Songs and music can likewise truly be called symbols. Symbolism contains an intuitive or suggestive power which appeals not only to the intellect — as a sign we have to interpret — but as a stimulating force that catches up the total person — heart and mind — and which creates resulting attitudes "for better or for worse." (This is indeed, an apt phrase because music is the wedding of words with beautiful melody.)

these details reflect the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem (66-70 A.D.). The Church interpreted the horror of those years as a punishment upon Israel for rejecting the gospel, persecuting Christians and putting them to death (for instance, stoning St. Stephen). So she wove these facts into the parable. Those sent into the byroads rounding up good and bad refer to the Gentile mission. Matthew, moreover, unlike Luke, specifies that the wedding is a feast made by a king for his son. The king symbolizes God the Father and the son, Jesus Christ. So the parable made into an allegory is a natural interpretation after the resurrection and destruction of Jerusalem.

If we disregard this later allegorization, what did Jesus really mean in the original parable? Very likely, it was judgment on His contemporaries who had rejected His invitation to the coming kingdom and an assurance to the outcasts with whom He often banqueted.


The First Reading clues us in to the original meaning of the parable — the image of the banquet. "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines"; that is, the Eucharist. It was instituted at the Last Supper on Mt. Zion.

"On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples"; that is death it was destroyed on Mt. Calvary by the resurrection.

"The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces; the reproach of his people"; that is, sin. The forgiveness of sin was instituted on Easter Sunday night.

And where shall all these gifts be found? "In the house of the Lord" (Response) — His Church. The emphasis is on "Everything is ready." The invitation has been offered to all Christians — theologians and laity alike. If they pay no heed, if they listen not to the Church, if they banquet not at her Eucharistic table, if they do not prepare themselves properly for this Eucharistic banquet, then others — the ungodly, the despised, yes even the communists — will take their place. Our Lady at Fatima deemed this possible: "Pray for sinners. Russia will be converted!"

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 22: 1-14. (R1) Is. 25: 6-10. (R2) Phil. 4: 12-14.

Although reflecting on God's word is not the time to air scholarly problems and solutions, yet I think the difficulties of Sunday's Gospel demand a little "higher criticism."

First of all, the gospel (long form) seems to consist of two parables spliced together by Matthew — the parable of the great banquet and the parable of the man without a wedding garment. Putting these two parables together creates an unrealistic effect. Haven't you often felt that the host of the wedding banquet was a bit unreasonable to throw out the guest not properly dressed? After all, how could the poor fellow hauled off the streets unexpectedly be expected to have a wedding garment?

As for the parable of the great banquet, that too was perhaps tampered with by Matthew or the Church. We say this, because a parable is generally a story that has only a single point to it. As such, it is used by speakers. But the "parable" of the wedding banquet has been allegorized. An allegory is a figure of speech used by writers, not preachers. An allegory differs from a parable in that every detail symbolizes something. Hence it is a studied effort put together in the quiet contemplation of an author's study.

Consider the "parable" of the wedding banquet. What invited guests would spurn an invitation; or, worse still, kill the messengers who delivered it! What host would send out an army and not only destroy those murderers but also burn their city! Obviously

Adoration Society Sets Mass, Supper

Auxiliary Bishop John E. McCafferty will offer the annual Nocturnal Adoration Society Mass and give the homily at Sacred Heart Cathedral on Thursday, Oct. 16.

The Mass at 6:30 p.m. will be followed by supper in the parish hall. Hector C. Lemieux, SSS, the national director of the society,

will explain new statutes adopted recently by the Archconfraternity for Nocturnal Adoration.

Women are invited to both the Mass and the supper. Supper tickets, at \$4, must be bought from group leaders. None will be sold at the door.

Chairman is Joseph E. Schmidt or Our Lady of Mercy parish.

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WORLD HUNGER

Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit will speak at 8 tonight at the University of Rochester Interfaith Chapel on Wilson Boulevard. His topic: A Moral Response to the World Hunger Crisis." Bishop Gumbleton is vice president of Bread for the World.

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