

Judging Music as Community Prayer

By Sister M. Florian Reichert SSJ
[Part II]

In the preceding article we spoke of worship music as servant, as communication and as celebration. Now, in order to choose wisely the music to be used, we need to be constantly aware of the guidelines that will aid in making such choices. We know, of course, that worship committees are not planning or providing entertainment for the people of God. The faith-community is not expecting to pray at a musical performance. Rather, the prayer of the community is waiting to be enriched by the music we choose.

Values Versus Types

Before we begin to choose music for the Sunday celebration we need to make sure that we are not confusing values of music with styles of music. Music can be formal, stylized, classical,

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suiting to great solemnity — and many people pray best with this type of music. Others pray better with an informal, social, folksy, friendly sort of music. Formality can sometimes stifle. Granted we need better informal music — yet, not all informal music is without value either in form or integrity as art. This points up the fact that we cannot be too personal in our judgment of values. All of us need to broaden our appreciation of different styles of music that can be utilized for prayer.

Musical Judgment

The music chosen must always precisely the point of the parable of the wicked tenants (27th Sunday): they refused to give the owner of the vineyard a return on his investment.

Even though Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world, yet God governs history, as the Cyrus story shows (R1). Temporal authority exists because God wills it. Sovereign and final authority remains that of God. The State can demand only our money and our services — never our souls, that is, the obedience we owe to God alone.

When teaching the way of God, Jesus was never moved by flattery, nor deterred by the rank of His hearers, nor by the unpleasant consequences that might follow from His words.

It takes a lot of courage today to stand up for truth. It takes a lot of Spirit-filled insight today to discern between good and evil spirits. That is why I like to shout "Hurrah for Nancy Murphy!" Hers is one of the most forthright and honest columns I've read in a long time. Hers is true grit, for she dares to unmask such sacred cows as UNICEF, SIECUS, ERA [the Equal Rights Amendment], and so on. Sargent Friday of *Dragnet* fame used to ask only for the facts, "Just the facts, M'am." (Incidentally, eighteen of the twenty documents used by Mrs. Murphy in her article on UNICEF were published by UNICEF itself.) This fact, I say, is remarkable, for facts are the one thing that have of late been woefully lacking in what has come to be called "advocacy journalism."

Lincoln once said that all that the nation needed to be saved was to tell the people the truth. Our Lord put it another way: "Beware of wolves who come to you in sheep's clothing." And boy, have we got sheep's clothing: high-sounding acronyms and weasel words like UNICEF, SIECUS, ERA. It is about time that writers and speakers and teachers begin to probe into these euphonies and lay bare for our people their full implications.

May the Nancy Murphys, the Senator Buckleys, and the Dr. Mildred Jeffersons increase; and may the lily-livered decrease — those who succumb to the flattery of being thought "liberals" or who deem it sacrilegious to challenge modern Pharisees (the pseudo-intellectual establishment at the university level) or modern Herods (the many secularistic, black-gowned judges).

Our Blessed Lord locked horns with the elite of His day — and it was all over the truth! Flattery did not sway Him, nor did fear deter Him. In the end, Truth was crucified, but —

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne. — Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."

be technically, aesthetically and expressively good. Any artist-musician will agree that the goodness of music is inherent in its beauty. Hence this quality of beauty becomes a first concern. Nothing ugly can be a good servant of prayer. It must also have integrity as art. If it lacks goodness of form and text, music can impair rather than serve. This kind of discerning judgment needs the competency of a trained musician. He is needed also for the best rendition of good music. Yet, this trained person — and in fact, all concerned about worship music — must recognize that not all "good" music, no matter how well it is rendered or correctly performed, is suited to be the servant of prayer.

Certainly, an awkward melody lacks the power to unite a congregation. A song that goes nowhere, a dull, sing-songy melody, an endless series of over-worked phrases or cadences are all poor communicators. When music is trite it can be annoying to adults not because it is simple but because it is trivial and stupid. There is great art in simplicity in its truest sense. It is our duty, therefore, to find good music, to encourage the composition of new good church music of all kinds.

Liturgical Judgment

If we say that the ministerial function of music is to be the servant of prayer it must be not only liturgically artistic, but it must be pastorally functional at the moment and place in the liturgy where it is used. No type need be excluded, but we need to guard against admitting the cheap, the trite, or musical clichés often found in popular songs ("instant liturgy" this is called). Music of such lesser value cheapens our liturgy and invites failure, to say nothing of exposing it to ridicule. Musicians and planners of liturgy therefore, must know the creative growth of liturgy, its history and origins, its developments and potential.

Unless they know the reason for or the liturgical meaning of the various moments in liturgy such as the entrance or offertory processions, the nature and reason for litany forms, the reason and manner in which acclamations or processions are to be sung, our music can fall flat on its face. And too often it does! If we possess this background

Injured SSJ's Working Way Back to Health

Report from the St. Joseph Motherhouse on the four sisters who were injured in a two-car crash Sept. 28: they are doing very well.

Sister Jamesine Riley, the new superior general, is back in motion on one foot and crutches while her shattered ankle mends. She has been living with her colleagues at St. Ann's Home, for the past week, learning to use the crutches in their single-floor living quarters.

Sister Louise Weber, who suffered a broken pelvis, is practising with a walker and is expected back at the Motherhouse "any day now," from Rochester General Hospital.

Sisters Barbara Ann Foos and Mary David McCall, who were not hospitalized, are recovering satisfactorily. All four are members of the congregation's new central administration.

knowledge of liturgy we can legitimately ask — and frequently — "Does the music we choose fulfill its ministerial function for this congregation?" The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in its chapter on music tells us what purposes it should be serving. Music "can create an element of solemnity, of joyful celebration, if well-chosen and tastefully rendered." It is a unifying force for the community for "unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved through unity of voices." To speak of judging music pastorally means that it must always enable the people to enter into the action, the need, the spirit of the liturgical moment.

When we speak of music we must include its total spectrum: instruments, voices, bodily gestures, as well as spaces for silence created by its absence. An organ prelude before a liturgical celebration can set the tone. Soft, reflective music leading into spritely, lively music with a fanfare of trumpets can effectively announce the


procession. Organ and/or flute over plucked guitar strings provides a nice accompaniment for a responsorial psalm. Light musical accompaniment to the reading of a psalm with congregation singing the refrain can touch hearts and aid in prayer. Flutes and/or strings after Communion during the period of Thanksgiving is in good taste.

Music is not only "singing." In fact, too much singing, too much verbiage can become tiresome and boring. We chatter too much in our liturgies. To highlight the musical moments of prayer a recording might sometimes be used.

A good balance in types of music serves both liturgical and pastoral needs. If used judiciously instruments as well as vocal music enhance prayer. Used in good taste, all types create prayerful spaces in which people are drawn upward and are opened up to God in love and mercy.

To be continued next week.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 22: 15-21. (R1) Is. 45: 1, 4-6. (R2) Thes. 1: 1-5.

The Pharisees' question in Sunday's Gospel about the tribute money is a classic example of the so-called pronouncement story with its 3-fold form of (1) setting, (2) action, and (3) pronouncement. Everything is subordinated to the punchline: the pronouncement.

The setting: The Pharisees sent their disciples with the Herodians to entrap Jesus. The Pharisees were anti-Roman; the Herodians were members of the circle of Herod who were partisans of his pro-Roman policy. The trap was a dilemma, baited with flattery.

A quipster once said, "Only three kinds of people fall for flattery: men, women, and children." So the enemies of Jesus began with flattery. "Teacher, we know you are a truthful man and teach God's way sincerely. You court no one's favor and do not act out of human respect." Any man less than Jesus could have fallen for such a line.

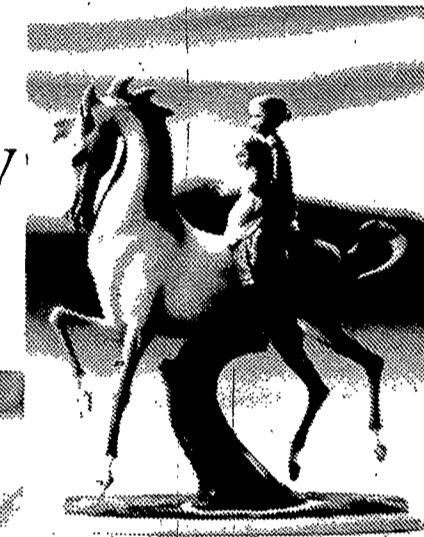
Then came the question: "Is it lawful to pay tax to the emperor or not?" People believed the Messiah would end Roman rule. If Jesus had come out for Roman authority, He would have lost the confidence of the people and would have given the Pharisees a plausible excuse for their enmity. If He had come out against Roman authority, the Herodians would eagerly have denounced Him as a political insurgent.

The action: "Show me the coin used for the tax." Probably this coin was a denarius. It would bear a portrait of the Emperor Tiberius (14-37 A.D.). The inscription on it would have been: **T[iberius] Caesar Divi Aug[ustus] F[ilius] Augustus**, which means Tiberius Caesar, august son of divine Augustus.

The pronouncement: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's." The answer of Jesus was masterful. If they accepted the benefits of Caesar, as was evidenced by their using his coins, then they must expect to pay for them. Then Jesus went beyond the question. What about God whose providence looks out for all men? They must give to God what belongs to Him. That was

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