

Let's Ring the Rafters!

By SISTER JOSEPHA KENNEDY

Congregational singing has not been an integral part of Roman Catholic liturgy since before the Reformation. It may well be that a Church with an Italian hierarchy and aesthetic can't indulge in anything as unmusical as all of us bawling out hymns from the pews. With Palestrina, Lassus and Verdi all peering down from celestial box seats, who dares to sing plain old Praise to the Lord?

Seriously, why are we having such a hard time with this directive of Vatican II to join in with singing? What keeps the "showy tenor," the "Sweet Adeline bass," the "vacuum cleaner soprano" absolutely mute at Sunday worship?

I'm sure some are thinking, "Our parish has good singing. She must not know about us." True, personally am not familiar with many parishes, but I hear from many at workshops and at the liturgy in-

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

stitute each year. The music commission has attacked the problem by recruiting and training volunteers for the crucial role of song leader. But I'm convinced that that's not even half the problem. There are still several other participants within a congregation: celebrant, lectors, ushers and congregation.

Nothing so encourages people as the strong voice of the priest on the entrance and recessional hymns. It expresses such solidarity and joyful anticipation. Even to the man who is self-conscious about his voice, I say, "No one cares if you're not Caruso or Johnny Cash." Half the

problem for the person in the pew is nervousness that one's voice will sound strange to one's neighbors. But if the priest is hopelessly unable to sing out, at least let him carry the missalette or hymnal and mouth the words. (Shades of the little blackbirds in the first grade! What everlasting damage was done to those little, easily-trained monotones!) Let him occasionally mention the singing in an encouraging way, from the altar or the pulpit.

Secondly, let parish liturgy committees urge the ushers and lectors to do likewise. Show an interest in the singing! A lector at our church often says, "Now let us

respond to the readings with the hymn." If the song leader sings the Gospel Alleluia, couldn't the lector sing along with the congregation? And the ushers, usually strategically placed around the church, couldn't they join in some of the singing? These are liturgical ministers, so perhaps an appeal to them to support the ministers of music and the congregation in this special effort would be appropriate.

Finally, let the man, woman and child in the pew give some thought to the incongruity of keeping silent when the congregation is supposed to be singing. Are spectator sports beginning to affect our liturgical life? Is silence appropriate at a wedding reception, a birthday party, a Christmas dinner?


We are celebrating our worship, we are loving our God, we are sharing our faith and joy as God's people. Can't we try to sing? Even if the whole family laughs at somebody's voice or mistake on the way home in the car?

Think about it. It isn't like joining a choir or volunteering as song leader. No talent is required. It only takes conviction — and maybe a little humility.

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WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 5:21-43. (R1) Wis. 1:13-15; 2:23-24. (R2) 2 Cor. 8:7-9; 13-15.

Recently, I read an article in *Spiritual Life* (Summer, 1976). It was about prayer, thought and action. Father Thomas Kane, the author, made some worthwhile observations about meditating on the word of God.

I believe many people do not know what to do with the word of God in the Sunday liturgies. Too often we attack the text with our minds and let it go at that. Study is good, but study is not prayer. Prayer is a two-way street: we speak to God and God speaks to us. He speaks to us in His word. One side of prayer, therefore, is to listen.

Generally, when we listen to others, we aren't really listening to them. We hear ourselves. It takes the miracle of love to get us to listen really — to listen not just to words, but through the words to the person himself. In some such way, we must learn to grow to listen more deeply to the words of Jesus. "The whole point," writes Father Kane, "is to listen as if my whole life depends on it — and it does. It is to listen in trust, in openness, in surrender — without defending myself against God in any way." To listen like that, I have to become more than silent — I have to become still, totally quiet. "I empty myself of noisy chatter; I lay down the preoccupations of the day, and the stillness comes upon me."

"In that stillness I read the gospel stories. Slowly, I turn the words over, again and again. Sometimes I try to climb into the gospel story by using my imagination, so that I can hear what it is really saying. Sometimes this simple, prayerful reading catches me so deeply that I cannot go on. I stop and the imagining that accompanies the reading seems to pause and I am just there. I am held there; I wait. When I wander I read again. I drift less and the stillness, the listening is deeper. I am beginning to listen right

through the words. He speaks in a way deeper than words. I sit there listening and listening. Sometimes I read, more and more I wait.

Attack next Sunday's readings that way. The gospel is about a 12-year-old girl. She is critically ill. Her father loves her so, he will do anything to save her — even go to Jesus. As Jesus heads for her home, the drama is heightened by a delay on the road. A woman suffering from a hemorrhage for 12 years touches Him and is cured. However, lest the crowds interpret this cure magically, Jesus stops and insists that the woman was healed not by any automatic force emanating from Himself, but only through her faith in Him.

The delay is just long enough for the girl to die, and the cure is sufficient enough to ignite the flame of faith in her father. It is this faith of his that saves the girl.

What a beautiful scene to jump into with our imagination. Picture if you will the jostling oriental bazaar-crowds, following to see the Wonder-worker work. Mark, as usual, gives vivid details: the name and title of the girl's father; the girl's death while Jesus is on the way; she is 12 years old and the woman has suffered for 12 years; the father and the woman both came to Jesus out of desperation (they had nowhere else to turn); the father calls his little girl "daughter" and Jesus addresses the woman as "daughter."

As one listens to the story in stillness, the words should fade and Jesus should stand out. The first reading especially carries us beyond the words. "God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living." Do we hear what God is saying to us now? He says, "Your miseries, your sufferings, your afflictions, your death — I neither wished these nor planned them. I formed man to be imperishable. The world I created was an Eden."

How then did evil enter the world? "By the envy of the devil." The first man and woman had it too good ever to rebel against God. They needed prodding from without. Scripture calls the prodder a snake for what he did to man, and names him the devil.

And what did God do? He does what Jesus does. He saves. Saves not just from sickness, not just from death, but from the death of sin and the dominion of the devil.

So Sunday we will utter four times the refrain: "I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me."

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