

# Folk Music: Call to Professionalism

By Sister Monica Weis, SSJ

More than ten years have passed since Vatican II prompted the first dramatic changes in the liturgy. Folk music, a post-Conciliar innovation, has run the gamut from violent opposition to band-wagon approval to ineffective and often offensive existence.

What happened? Where did we go wrong? Was this merely a fad?

Probably the main contribution of folk music over the years has been an experience of happy music that touched the spirits of the young at heart. Rhythms similar to modern music proclaimed "The world is one" worship and everyday living belong together, "my God is not separate from my workday world." But why is that message no longer adequately proclaimed in many parishes today?

One reason is that those involved in preparing and providing folk music for the liturgy need to realize that they are ministers of the worship service — helpers for a deep experience of Christianity. That is to say, the folk group is not in the sanctuary to entertain the congregation but to assist in providing an atmosphere of joyful worship. The music is not a performance such as a rock band or coffee house group might rehearse for, its role is to inspire and aid the faithful in prayer.

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Thus, a strong leader with a sense of liturgy is needed to encourage the people in song during the service, a leader to direct the congregation's attention to the presence of Christ on the altar, a leader who has studied the Mass texts for that particular Sunday and has chosen hymns to illustrate the theme.

It may sound as though the music is secondary to the Mass ritual and therefore unimportant. Secondary, yes. Unimportant, no!

The very fact that the focus of the service is on the Mass itself and not on the musical performance demands a high degree of professionalism among musicians. Inaccurate guitar playing, off-key singing, inattentive or sloppily dressed musicians distract the congregation from prayer and negate the possible good effects of folk music.

On the other hand, the precision guitar-picking and harmonious singing of a rehearsed ensemble, whose members are aware of the importance of their ministry, provides an atmosphere of worship which can inspire an entire congregation. A difficult task, to be sure, and one that requires hours of

wanted them to withdraw with Him awhile — to catch their breath or to keep out of political trouble.


They got into a boat and the people spotted the direction they were sailing. So they hotfooted it around the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee and by the time Jesus and the apostles, who had been drifting leisurely, had arrived, there was a crowd already waiting for them. An ordinary man would have been annoyed or irritated at this invasion of privacy or denial of a well-deserved rest. But Jesus was no ordinary man. He allowed Himself no irritation nor the slightest impatience. Rather His great heart was moved with compassion. He reacted like a good shepherd, who finds a flock of his sheep lost in the wilderness. He immediately tended to them, fed them first with the bread of truth, divine revelation, to satisfy their spiritual hunger; and then with loaves and fish to fill their empty stomachs.

How important good shepherds are for the people! Once a year we pray for vocations to the priesthood. But ought we not pray daily for good shepherds?

There is a saying that was often quoted to us when we were preparing for the priesthood, "If you want your people to be good, you must be very good; if you want your people to be very good, you must be holy; if you want your people to be holy, you must be a saint."

Maybe we ought to turn this saying around, lest there happen in the spiritual order what so often happens in the political order — that people get the leaders they deserve. If we want good shepherds then we ought not only to pray for them, but we ought also be more faithful to the promptings of the Good Shepherd. For there is another saying that "a parish gets the priests its people deserve."

**WORD FOR SUNDAY**



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 6:30-34. (R1) Jer. 23:1-6. (R2) 2:13-18.

In next Sunday's first reading, we hear an angry Jeremiah denouncing the contemporary kings of his native Judah. He echoes God's condemnation: "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture." In the East shepherds led the flock and the sheep followed, but these shepherd kings "have driven my flock away." And the judgment? "I will take care to punish your evil deeds."

God, however, and so His mouthpieces, the prophets, seldom condemn without at the same time holding forth hope. Jeremiah in consequence foretells two future blessings that would follow upon Judah's punishment. First there would be a restoration of the people after they had been scattered in exile — "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them." And secondly, jibing at the present king, Zedekiah (whose name meant "God, my justice"), Jeremiah said, "God will raise up a righteous shoot to David" — a real son of David, a true shepherd for His people, who will live up to the name "The Lord our justice."

The Response says this shepherd is the Lord. "The Lord is my shepherd." And Sunday's gospel portrays Him shepherding His people. The apostles have just returned from their first mission. It is the first time Mark speaks of them as apostles — perhaps to distinguish them from John's disciples about whom he had just been writing. Mark, therefore, is using the term here, not in an official, but in a literal sense, as meaning men sent by Christ. It was their first sally on their own. So when they had returned, Jesus

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## INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

practice, commitment to schedules and training in liturgical worship for all those involved.

Underlying the notion of professionalism among folk music groups, and indeed all church music, is the need for a paid musical director. When parish financial committees recognize music as an essential aspect of liturgy (more important, perhaps, than color-coordinated flowers or a second set of banners) and agree to

### Carmelites Note Feast

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan will celebrate a Mass in honor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel on her Feast Day, Friday, July 16, at 9:30 a.m. in the chapel of the Carmelite Monastery. The public is invited to the event at the cloister located at 1931 West Jefferson Rd. opposite Locust Hill Country Club.

The Carmelites were the first religious order to be established in the original 13 states. Mother Bernadina Matthews founded the first Carmel at Port Tobacco, Md. in 1790. That Carmel later moved to Baltimore.

Mother Beatrix, foundress of the Rochester Carmel in 1930, had entered the Baltimore Carmel in 1868 and had lived with four nuns who were novices at the original foundation.

hire a trained musician, then we can hope for an improvement in the quality of all aspects of church music: instrumental, polyphonic, and folk.

The Church's history of relying on "contributed services" is driving away many serious professional musicians. This is not to say that volunteer musicians have not been valuable and appreciated. It is to say that the Church is losing the creative richness and integrity of sound that a professional can elicit from a group.

Today it is essential that we be informed about liturgical options and developments, but it is urgent that we encourage the highest quality of musical participation for our worship services. If we agree with St. Augustine's maxim, "To sing is to pray twice," then we need to carry out this ministry as perfectly as we can.

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