

Insights in Liturgy

By Sister Nancy Burkin, SSJ

Choosing Music for Holy Week

Just as the choice of music for the Lenten season is determined by a sense of the mystery of that season in the lives of a people, so too, choosing music for Holy Week presupposes a knowledge of what this particular week means in the life of a Christian people who make up a parish community.

Holy Week has suffered misunderstanding for years. Because of its intense spiritual emphasis, it has become so special that, in many cases, it does not seem to flow from the Lenten Season but rather seems to stand alone as the peak Christian experience. Too, many look upon the week as a re-presentation of the historic facts surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus and tend to be motivated by "being with Jesus as He dies and suffers." In both cases we need to expand our vision.

Holy Week is the culmination of the Lenten Season and as such flows directly from that experience. If Lent has been an intense religious experience, then Holy Week will be. If not, Holy Week will be just another occasion when we spend more time "in church."

Throughout the Lenten Season, we hopefully have become more deeply aware of the way we participate in the dying and rising of Jesus. As we clear away the excess baggage that we have accumulated over the year in our lives, we come to see that it is His death and resurrection that give our daily dying and rising meaning. So we gather together during Holy Week to ritualize that dying and rising. We do not come to be with Jesus who died and rose once for all, but we come so He will be with us, so that we can see once more — and on a deeper level — that our dying and rising makes sense and are meaningful in Him.

Those whose responsibility it is to choose music

for the Holy Week celebration must see this week for what it is and the prayer that is chosen to be sung must help the people to express their faith in the Paschal Mystery which they celebrate. The music must be prayer for them and at the same time speak truthfully of what we are about as Church during this week. The planning of music for Holy Week ought to take place at the same time that music is planned for Lent so that the flow between the two will be apparent.

Holy Week begins with Passion (Palm) Sunday. On this day we celebrate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and see in it the reason for our own entering more deeply into the Paschal Mystery. Certainly the procession with the palms ought to be accompanied by music. Participating in the procession ought to give us a sense of "entering in," of willingly proceeding to an authentic acceptance of ourselves with our shortcomings, our faults, our problems and difficulties, of giving ourselves over to the Lord Jesus, for it is in Him that we have our worth. A Palm Sunday procession ought to move, then, from place to place — not down the aisle and back again. Since people cannot be expected to walk any distance while trying to read, use a simple refrain such as Hosanna by Brother Gregory of Weston Priory or the refrain from the King of Glory by Willard Jabusch and have a cantor sing appropriate verses. The people are then freed of the burden of a lot of singing and can get in touch with the meaning of their action. As with the other Sundays of Lent keep the music simple on Palm Sunday. Jesus was a King whose crown was one of thorns and who ruled from a cross of rough wood. It is contradictory to give expression to ideas of kingship with much regality and pomp.

Holy Thursday is a celebration that particularly calls us to focus on the basics of our Christian lives. Jesus urges us in the Gospel reading to cast away all pretenses of

grandeur and self-importance and to bend to serve others; then in the Eucharist. He calls us to take on that which gives us true worth — His Body under the simplest of forms: bread and wine. Parish musicians ought to be careful not to over-celebrate this feast musically. Many times, at least musically, Easter loses some of its impact through an overdone Holy Thursday. Rather than singing a large work for the Gloria, why not sing only the congregational refrain and use a good reader to proclaim the three sections in this hymn? Use simple acclamations with perhaps a little harmony on the amen of the Eucharistic Prayer. During the procession of the Blessed Sacrament the people might be asked to alternate with the choir or a cantor in the singing of Pange Lingua unaccompanied. If so, do it quietly, unhurriedly, and simply allowing for some silent periods between the verses.

Good Friday speaks the loudest in silence. Sing simple arrangements with no accompaniment or harmony. Try to avoid hymns about "poor Jesus suffering and dying" but use hymns that speak of

our willingness to take on the sufferings and dying by which we participate in this great mystery. To Be Your Body by Joe Wise is a fitting refrain for use during the veneration of the cross or the reception of Communion. Have the congregation sing the refrain while verses from Psalm 21 (22) are recited. The Reproaches are no longer used.

The Easter Vigil ceremony is the greatest celebration of the Christian community. As the season works up to this peak celebration so the celebration of the Easter Vigil itself gradually builds in intensity. An adequate description of the use of music during this ceremony would fill many pages. The Liturgy Commission will soon publish a booklet on the Easter Vigil which should be a help to all who are planning for this celebration.

As with Lent, the music of Holy Week must be an adequate expression of faith for the people who participate by singing and or listening. It is for them and with them that music for this entire religious experience ought to be planned and chosen.

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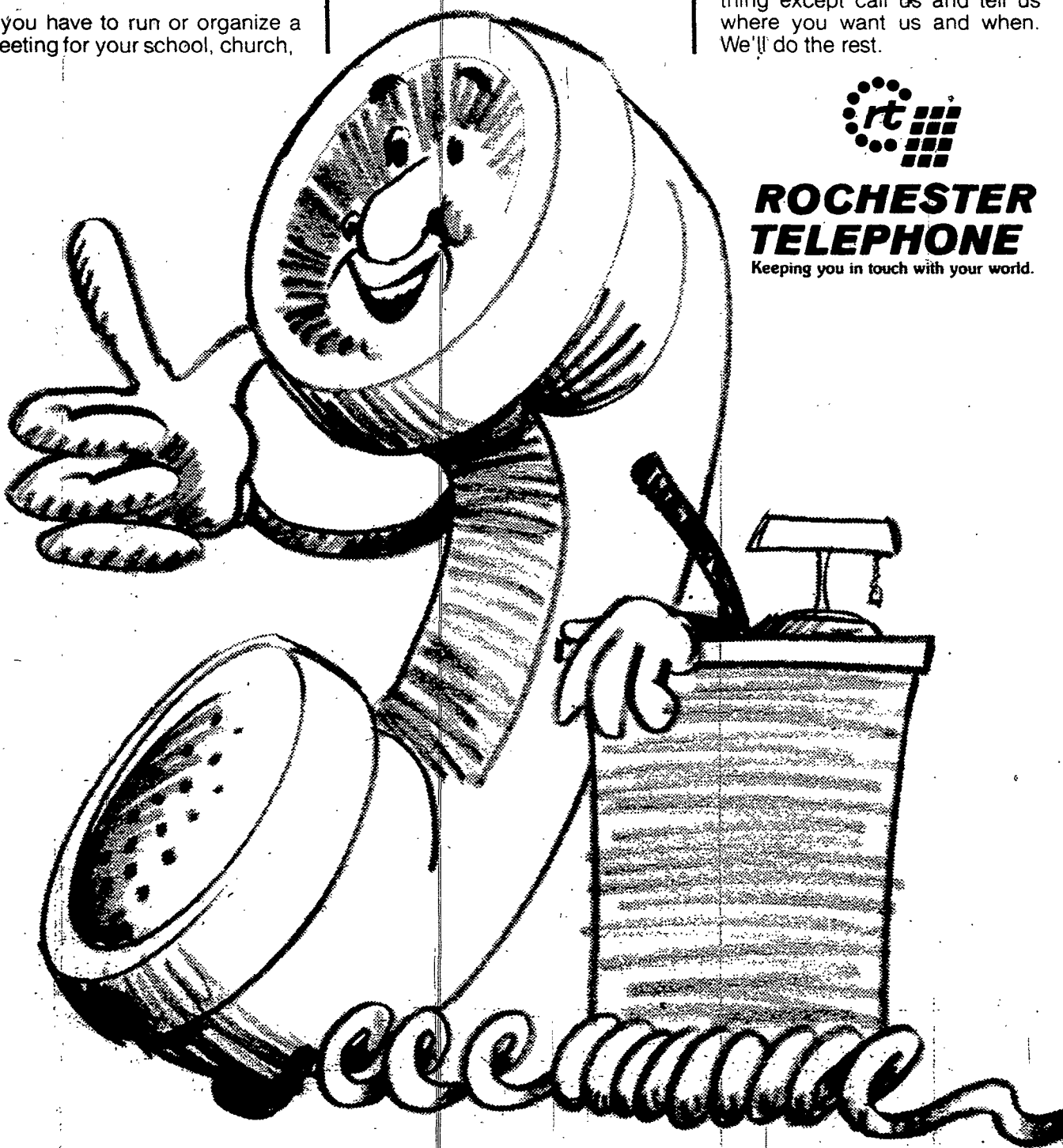
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St. Ann's Visitor

David C. Crowley, executive vice-president of the American Association of Homes for the Aged, toured St. Ann's Home and The Heritage recently. AAHA is an organization of more than 1,600 non-profit facilities rendering care for the elderly. Mr. Crowley is shown above with Sister Marie Michelle Peartree, SSJ, St. Ann's administrator. They discussed matters concerning the elderly on a national level.

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