

Insights in Liturgy

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

Music For Communion

By the very nature of the action, Communion demands singing. The processing to the table of the Lord, the unity with Christ in this sacrament, and the consequent spiritual union of all the communicants is a source of deep joy for all. What better way to express that joy than by singing together as the assembly of God's faithful and grateful People.

After the singing of the Gospel Acclamations and the acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer, the song at Communion is next in priority for congregational participation. It enables the community to maintain and expand its joyous grateful feelings, to acclaim the significance of the mystery of Christ present, and to bring to fulfillment, however briefly, the unity this act signifies.

Unfortunately two sins are committed in this regard: (1) there is no singing and music at Communion, and (2) there is too much singing and music. There is obviously no room for either

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Guided tours of Temple B'rith Kodesh, and of the temple museum of ancient and modern artifacts, will be conducted Oct. 23 and 24 during the Temple Sisterhood's 15th annual antique show. The Judaica gift shop also will be open.

Fifty dealers from various sections of the country will show china, silver, furniture, oriental art objects, primitive works, glass, buttons and jewelry. There will be also home-made foods, fresh apples and collectors' items donated by Sisterhood members, as well as an all-day snack bar and a restaurant offering traditional delicacies.

A scholarship fund for the underprivileged of all faiths, and interfaith programs, are among the beneficiaries of this project. Admission to the antique show costs \$1.50.

sins of omission or commission at Communion!

In looking for solutions to musical problems at Communion, it must first be clear to all that singing at this point in the worship is to be done by the whole assembly. This is where those with no singing or music raise the oft-repeated cry: "how can the congregation sing when they're coming to Communion? They can't carry hymnals (or missalettes or papers) and still have the options for receiving Communion." The latter objection is true: people should be free to receive Communion in the hand and from the cup. But this does not eliminate congregational singing: a wide range of musical options remain available. Pastoral musicians should select either antiphonal music or that with such a strong, simple refrain that it requires no textual aid. Then a cantor and/or choir can supply the verses. Congregational participation can be wholehearted and full without being distracting or demanding great effort.

The unity signified in the sharing of Communion needs to be supported and enhanced by the singing and music. Mood and style of the selection also serve the overall meaning of this action.

For these reasons, a single musical work should be selected for the entire procession, one that is adequate in length and content. The compulsion to fill in all silence with one song after another is disruptive of prayer and unity. It gives the impression that music has to be there regardless of feel, content, ritual flow and musical style - like muzak gone wild!

Much better alternatives would include interludes or improvisations, in the course of the selected song, and continuing instrumentally after the text is done (no repeating verses!) by improvising on the hymn, changing registration, dividing melody and harmony between manuals, or allowing various instruments to carry the melody at a changed dynamic level. The song of silence is not a bad choice either, allowing the Communion Song to continue in each one's heart. We need to have it firmly in

hand that there should be no "Top 40 Countdown" with second and third Communion Songs - and meditation songs besides!

Selection of music should reflect the vitality and rhythm and significance in faith of this action. Marian hymns and moralistic hymns ("Whatsoever You Do") are not appropriate. Neither are most Benediction hymns which reflect adoration rather than communion. In the major seasons of the Church year, seasonal hymns are appropriate; at other times, songs consistent with the action of Communion and the paschal character of Sunday should be chosen.

"Communion Meditation" is another compulsion which should be carefully re-

examined. Is it helping people to pray or is it a distracting showcase for choir or soloist? Is it more helpful for prayer than instrumental music (no drivel please!) or silence? Silence could be chosen as the best possible meditation song, followed by a Song of Thanksgiving done by all. This could then be the final song of the celebration with only an instrumental recessional played after the Blessing.

Obviously, music for Communion is only one segment of liturgical music planning. Balance in music for the celebration should be sought, and selections should always be made with a heart aimed at fostering the prayer and faith of all who gather.

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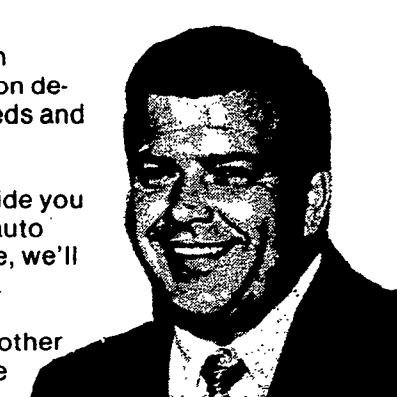
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