

Singers share talents to honor Sacred Heart

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

NAPLES — According to an old saying, singing is praying twice.

In the case of the Sacred Heart Singers, it's more like praying five times.

Beginning as a folk group at St. Francis DeSales Parish in Geneva more than a decade ago, the Sacred Heart Singers have evolved into a musical ensemble tied to no specific church. Instead, the singers have adopted a ministry of providing music for weekend liturgies at parishes that might not otherwise have music — most recently for Palm Sunday Masses at St. Januarius Parish in Naples.

Along the way, the group has developed a repertoire that ranges from spirituals to Schubert — with stops at Mozart, Mendelssohn and contemporary liturgical music in between — sung in intricate, four-part harmony, frequently with little or no musical accompaniment.

But behind the music lies a desire to bring a spirit of reverence to the services for which the group provides music.

"I'm not up there for anybody to see me," explained tenor Randy Parsons. "I want people to see Jesus. I want people to be touched by the music I contribute to."

"We've been told by people that the music moves them," noted Cathy Lawlor, who sings alto. "If the music makes them closer to God, that's what we want."

"What we are trying to do is bring the heart back into the Eucharistic celebration," acknowledged group leader Tony Rowe, who sings bass, arranges and sometimes composes the group's music. "We

want to bring it through music, and music done well."

Rowe has a long-term commitment to "music done well." A 1974 graduate of Hobart College in Geneva with a degree in music education, he taught music at both St. Francis and St. Stephen's schools in Geneva, and guitar and music theory at Hobart College and Community College of the Finger Lakes. He has also sung with college and community choirs, and has studied classical guitar for 24 years.

In the mid-1970s, Rowe began directing the folk group at St. Francis DeSales Parish. Soon, he began introducing the group to more than contemporary liturgical music.

"It was a struggle for me to stay with folk because of my training," Rowe said. "I think folk music is fine, but I have a love for the classical music. I wanted the harmonies. I wanted the polyphony."

Rowe also wanted to restore some of the stature once accorded to liturgical music. "I feel like years ago the best music and the best musicians were in the church," he said. "I feel like God is not getting the best fruits of our talents."

The group developed over the decade that followed. Lawlor, for example, joined after she and her husband happened to go to St. Francis one Sunday and heard the group. "I said, 'I really want to be a part of this,'" she recalled.

Mary Puls, who sings second soprano, also joined the folk group during this period, as did Nancy Rowe, who sings first soprano. A West Point graduate stationed

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The Sacred Heart Singers of Geneva shared their musical talents with the parishioners of St. Januarius in Naples for last Palm Sunday weekend. Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Life in Christ gained by cross of glory

turgy prefigures the glory of Christ, which is the outcome of his saving activity for us, and the reading of the passion focuses us on the fact that any share in Christ's resurrection means we must also share his death. Christ's body broken for us and blood poured out for us are celebrated in Holy Thursday's Mass of the Lord's Supper, in every Eucharist, and in all the ways we offer humble service to our brothers and sisters, and to the world.

Good Friday's celebration of the Lord's Passion turns us directly to the central image of these "high holy days" — the cross. The fasting and abstinence of this day, the bare silence that begins the liturgy, the stark nakedness of the church environment, the sparseness of musical accompaniment — all conspire to draw us to the terror of death.

Yet this is not a morbid or despairing death-watch. It is the hopeful celebration of life gained through the wood of the cross. The death of the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) will ransom many, and Christ, this suffering servant, freely hands himself over to death, that this

ransom may be accomplished. St. John's Passion (John 18:1-19:42) does not tell the story of the bloody suffering and death of a misunderstood and rejected Jesus; rather this is a Jesus firmly in control of his own death, firmly committed to carrying out the divine will that all will be drawn to Christ when he is "lifted up." The cross of Christ is not the instrument of defeat, but the cross of victory by which the power of sin and death is broken, and we are rescued and set free.

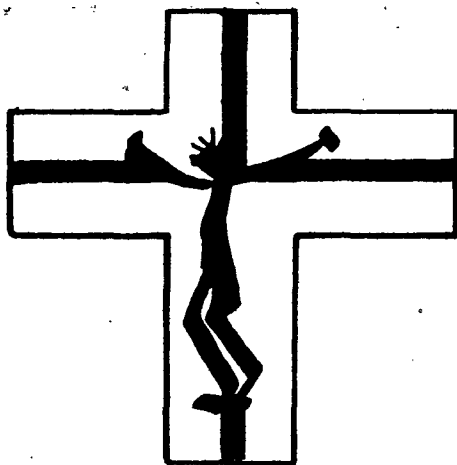
In light of so joyous a reality, we venerate the wood of the cross, singing praises to the holy, immortal God who, while we were still sinners and in death's clutches, loved us and sent us Jesus to die for us. Our veneration of the wood of the cross honors the tree of life, which enables our return to the garden of paradise. The wood of the cross is "the true vine" to which we are now attached and from which we draw the nourishment and strength to bear fruit.

This life in Christ gained by the cross of glory is most profoundly and dramatically celebrated in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil. As the new fire bursts into flame and the light of Christ shines in our midst, the darkness of our lives is dispelled. The dark forces of human existence cannot overcome those who "keep the flame of faith

alive in their hearts." As the Easter Proclamation sings out: "Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes forever!"

Life for us in Christ's death and resurrection has been God's plan from the beginning when "waters gathered on the face of the earth and life appeared." The readings of the vigil tell the story of God's love affair with humankind from their creation (reading I) to covenant (II) to liberation (III), a story of humanity's infidelity (IV) and God's fidelity (V), humanity's search for life (VI) and God's providing it again and again (VII). The promise "you will be my people and I will be your God" is fulfilled once and for all in the raising of Jesus from the dead (Gospel).

There is no greater proof of this truth than the initiation of catechumens. Through the gracious love of God in the action of the church, these chosen ones go into the water and die with Christ, rising with him to new life and membership in his Body. Born into Christ by the waters of baptism, they shine with Christ, "a sign of life and salvation." They are the sacrament that says we are all God's beloved people, "christened," marked with the sign of Christ's cross of glory. In this, Easter dawns.



CROSS OF GLORY
LIFE IN CHRIST

By Father Robert J. Kennedy
Guest columnist

The liturgies of Holy Week give shape to and deepen the faith that is celebrated in them. It is a faith that celebrates the death and resurrection of Christ as the power and pattern of our lives. The procession of palms that begins the Passion Sunday li-

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April 9 at 2-5 p.m. St. Patrick's Seneca Falls	May 8 at 7-9:30 p.m. Sacred Heart Cathedral Rochester	May 23 at 7-9:30 p.m. Our Lady of Lourdes Elmira
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