

Sing, Sing, Sing!
Bulletin Letter of July 30, 2006
by Fr. Brian Joyce

Dear Parishioners,

I might title this letter “Sing, Sing, Sing!” It’s triggered by the presence of Fr. Terry Loughran and his gifts which include organizing the youth in a challenging, inner city parish in Limerick into an internationally regarded Pipe Band (he plays the drums), offering concerts and C.D.’s with his compositions, voice and guitar. For us he has been a welcome gift. He leaves us on Monday, August 7th, but I hope his returns are regular and frequent. Thank you Terry.

But what about our own singing, especially when we gather for Mass? According to the official Vatican General Instruction for the celebration of Mass: “Singing is the sign of the heart’s joy . . . great importance should be attached to singing in the celebration of the Mass”. People sing all the time, in the shower, in the car, in the house, around the campfire, under the Christmas tree, at birthdays and at sports events. Let me list the reasons beyond that, why we sing at Mass:

- **Stretch** - to sing our praises, our sorrows, and our faith stretches us beyond mere thoughts and words to another level.
- **Community** – to sing unites us to the people around us (even when they are flat while we are on perfect pitch!). The General Instruction says our hymn is to “Foster the unity of those who have been gathered”.
- **Discipline** – an expert on prayer life, St. Therese of Avila says, “prayer without discipline is an illusion”. Song forces us to disciplined prayer either by following the notes or at least by making the effort to inhale and open our mouths with praise and faith.
- **Staying power** - sung prayer stays with us and we even remember songs and texts of prayer throughout the week and in non prayer places. As one musician pointed out to me “Father, people never leave Church humming the homily!!”
- **Joy** – we are a people of joy and hope but as Nietsche famously said to Christians in the 19th century “you certainly don’t look redeemed” and “if you want me to believe you have to sing better songs!” Singing reminds others and ourselves of the joy and hope that can sustain us.

You can probably add additional good reasons of your own. Add them up and know the reason why we “warm up” with song before every Mass, and join in sung prayer as we gather to worship.

There has recently been an online survey of 3,000 Catholics about their favorite liturgical songs. The most surprising find was the lack of any clear dominant choice. In fact the 3,000 participants named 670 different songs as most important for their own life and faith. Catholic songs written after 1965 made up more than half of the top twenty-five songs chosen. About a quarter of the top twenty-five came from an array of traditional hymns that predate the Second Vatican Council; and a good number came from Protestant and Evangelical sources. Funeral celebrations were by far the most commonly cited occasion on which a particular song made a lasting effect.

Here are the “top ten”: 1) “On Eagle’s Wings”; 2) “Here I Am Lord”; 3) “Be Not Afraid”; 4) “You Are Mine”; 5) “How Great Thou Art”; 6) “Holy God We Praise Thy Name”; 7) “Amazing Grace”; 8) “All Are Welcome”; 9) “Prayer of St. Francis”; and, 10) “Ave Maria” Keep singing: as one fine pastor (Fr. Bill Mullen when at St. John Vianney’s) once told us, “if you have a great voice, sing out to praise God; if you have a lousy voice, sing out to get even!!”

Your Pastor,
Brian T. Joyce