

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Feb 7th 2014

“He set singers before the altar and by their voices he made sweet melodies, he added beauty to the feasts and solemnized the seasons of each year so that when the Holy Name was praised, before daybreak the sanctuary would resound.” Sirach

Every week at the end of Saturday’s 5 p.m. Mass at St. John’s Church on campus, we applaud our musicians for making the “sweet melodies” that add so much “beauty to the feasts.” Thanks to them, our “sanctuary resounds” with the austere beauty of Advent music, the joy of Christmas carols, the St. Louis Jesuit hymns that touch our souls and ethnic hymns that rock the church.

King David would be proud to claim us as his liturgical descendants!

When I clap for our choir, I especially applaud the way they involve all of us in our musical celebration. Even those like me who can only warble along do so enthusiastically, moved and touched by the Spirit. As St. Augustine said, “they who sing pray twice.” Happily he didn’t say we have to sing well !!!

I almost hate to travel because too often it involves going to Mass at a church where a cantor with a gorgeous voice intones a hymn that no one else can sing – uninspiring music unfamiliar to anyone. Sadly we Catholics don’t have a long tradition of congregational singing like most Protestants and even years after Vatican II it shows.

Knowing how much a “resounding sanctuary” adds to prayer and worship, I offer a few suggestions to those stuck in churches like the ones above:

- Speak out. Ask your pastors and parish councils to place a priority on using music that the people can and will sing. Suggest that every Mass include at least one hymn that people know, even such old standbys as “Immaculate Mary” or “Holy God We Praise Thy Name.”

- Ask your cantors to practice hymns with the congregation before Mass. Whenever I’ve seen this done, participation improves.

•If you are blessed with a good voice, organize a chorus that will sing at Mass. It's amazing how much participation improves when there's a musical ensemble leading the way rather than just one person.

I bless the wonderful musicians at St. John's who feed my soul every week. What better way could there be for those with talent to serve the community and bring life to dead liturgies?

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