Significant church documents on the liturgy and the indispensable role of sacred music

**Vatican II and after**

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIIUM, “CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY” Vatican II, 1963

112. The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.

116. The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.

But other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action, as laid down in Art. 30. [excerpted below]

[30. To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.]

*NB: See discussion of “active participation” in No. 15, MUSICAM SACRAM, “INSTRUCTION ON MUSIC IN THE LITURGY,” 1967*

117. The typical edition of the books of Gregorian chant is to be completed; and a more critical edition is to be prepared of those books already published since the restoration by St. Pius X.

*NB: The “typical edition” is the Roman Gradual, published in 1974. The Gradual gives the texts of the propers for each Mass, with their accompanying Gregorian chants.*

121. . . . The texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine; indeed they should be drawn chiefly from holy Scripture and from liturgical sources.
MUSICAM SACRAM, “INSTRUCTION ON MUSIC IN THE LITURGY”
Sacred Congregation of Rites, 1967

2. The decisions of the Council have already begun to be put into effect in the recently undertaken liturgical renewal. But the new norms concerning the arrangement of the sacred rites and the active participation of the faithful have given rise to several problems regarding sacred music and its ministerial role. These problems appear to be able to be solved by expounding more fully certain relevant principles of the Constitution on the Liturgy.

15. The faithful fulfill their liturgical role by making that full, conscious and active participation which is demanded by the nature of the Liturgy itself and which is, by reason of baptism, the right and duty of the Christian people. This participation

(a) Should be above all internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace, 14

(b) Must be, on the other hand, external also, that is, such as to show the internal participation by gestures and bodily attitudes, by the acclamations, responses and singing. 15

The faithful should also be taught to unite themselves interiorly to what the ministers or choir sing, so that by listening to them they may raise their minds to God.

19. Because of the liturgical ministry it performs, the choir—or the Capella musica, or schola cantorum—deserves particular mention. Its role has become something of yet greater importance and weight by reason of the norms of the Council concerning the liturgical renewal. Its duty is, in effect, to ensure the proper performance of the parts which belong to it, according to the different kinds of music sung, and to encourage the active participation of the faithful in the singing. Therefore:

(a) There should be choirs, or Capellae, or scholae cantorum, especially in cathedrals and other major churches, in seminaries and religious houses of studies, and they should be carefully encouraged.

(b) It would also be desirable for similar choirs to be set up in smaller churches.

20. Large choirs (Capellae musicae) existing in basilicas, cathedrals, monasteries and other major churches, which have in the course of centuries earned for themselves high renown by preserving and developing a musical heritage of inestimable value, should be retained for sacred celebrations of a more elaborate kind, according to their own traditional norms, recognized and approved by the Ordinary.

However, the directors of these choirs and the rectors of the churches should take care that the people always associate themselves with the singing by performing at least the easier sections of those parts which belong to them.

28. The distinction between solemn, sung and read Mass, sanctioned by the Instruction of 1958 (n. 3), is retained, according to the traditional liturgical laws at present in force.
However, for the sung Mass (Missa cantata), different degrees of participation are put forward here for reasons of pastoral usefulness, so that it may become easier to make the celebration of Mass more beautiful by singing, according to the capabilities of each congregation.

These degrees are so arranged that the first may be used even by itself, but the second and third, wholly or partially, may never be used without the first. In this way the faithful will be continually led toward an ever greater participation in the singing.

29. The following belong to the first degree:

(a) In the entrance rites: the greeting of the priest together with the reply of the people; the prayer.

(b) In the Liturgy of the Word: the acclamations at the Gospel.

(c) In the Eucharistic Liturgy: the prayer over the offerings; the preface with its dialogue and the Sanctus; the final doxology of the Canon, the Lord's Prayer with its introduction and embolism; the Pax Domini; the prayer after the Communion; the formulas of dismissal.

30. The following belong to the second degree:

(a) the Kyrie, Gloria and Agnus Dei;

(b) the Creed;

(c) the prayer of the faithful.

31. The following belong to the third degree:

(a) the songs at the Entrance and Communion processions;

(b) the songs after the Lesson or Epistle;

(c) the Alleluia before the Gospel;

(d) the song at the Offertory;

(e) the readings of Sacred Scripture, unless it seems more suitable to proclaim them without singing.

32. The custom legitimately in use in certain places and widely confirmed by indults, of substituting other songs for the songs given in the Graduale for the Entrance, Offertory and Communion, can be retained according to the judgment of the competent territorial authority, as long as songs of this sort are in keeping with the parts of the Mass, with the feast or with the liturgical season. It is for the same territorial authority to approve the texts of these songs.
33. It is desirable that the assembly of the faithful should participate in the songs of the Proper as much as possible, especially through simple responses and other suitable settings.

The song after the lessons, be it in the form of gradual or responsorial psalm, has a special importance among the songs of the Proper. By its very nature, it forms part of the Liturgy, of the Word. It should be performed with all seated and listening to it—and, what is more, participating in it as far as possible.

34. The songs which are called the “Ordinary of the Mass”, if they are sung by musical settings written for several voices may be performed by the choir according to the customary norms, either a capella, or with instrumental accompaniment, as long as the people are not completely excluded from taking part in the singing.

In other cases, the parts of the Ordinary of the Mass can be divided between the choir and the people or even between two sections of the people themselves: one can alternate by verses, or one can follow other suitable divisions which divide the text into larger sections. In these cases, the following points are to be noted: it is preferable that the Creed, since it is a formula of profession of faith, should be sung by all, or in such a way as to permit a fitting participation by the faithful; it is preferable that the Sanctorus, as the concluding acclamation of the Preface, should normally be sung by the whole congregation together with the priest; the Agnus Dei may be repeated as often as necessary, especially in concelebrations, where it accompanies the Fraction; it is desirable that the people should participate in this song, as least by the final invocation.

35. The Lord’s Prayer is best performed by the people together with the priest. 22

If it is sung in Latin, the melodies already legitimately existing should be used; if, however, it is sung in the vernacular, the settings are to be approved by the competent territorial authority.

36. There is no reason why some of the Proper or Ordinary should not be sung in said Masses. Moreover, some other song can also, on occasions, be sung at the beginning, at the Offertory, at the Communion and at the end of Mass. It is not sufficient, however, that these songs be merely “Eucharistic”—they must be in keeping with the parts of the Mass, with the feast, or with the liturgical season.

47. . . . Pastors of souls should take care that besides the vernacular “the faithful may also be able to say or sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.” 33

65. In sung or said Masses, the organ, or other instrument legitimately admitted, can be used to accompany the singing of the choir and the people; it can also be played solo at the beginning before the priest reaches the altar, at the Offertory, at the Communion, and at the end of Mass.

The same rule, with the necessary adaptations, can be applied to other sacred celebrations.
66. The playing of these same instruments as solos is not permitted in Advent, Lent, during the Sacred Triduum and in the Offices and Masses of the Dead.
LETTER TO THE BISHOPS ON THE MINIMUM REPERTOIRE OF PLAIN CHANT, “VOLUNTATI OBSEQUENS”
Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, 1974

NB: The letter accompanied the booklet “Jubilate Deo,” which contains Gregorian chant settings of the ordinary as well as chant hymns (e.g., Salve Regina, Ubi Caritas, and Veni Creator) that should be known by all the faithful. The booklet is available online in both ancient and modern musical notation. The purpose of the initiative was “to facilitate the observance of the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council [that] ‘. . . steps must be taken to ensure that the faithful are able to chant together in Latin those parts of the ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them [2].’”

Down the centuries, Gregorian chant has accompanied liturgical celebrations in the Roman rite, has nourished men’s faith and has fostered their piety, while in the process achieving an artistic perfection which the Church rightly considers a patrimony of inestimable value and which the Council recognized as “the chant especially suited to the Roman liturgy.” [3]

One of the objectives of the liturgical reform is to promote community singing in assemblies of the faithful, so that they might the better express the festive, communal and fraternal character of liturgical celebrations. In effect, “the liturgical action becomes more dignified when it is accompanied by chant, when each minister fulfills his own role and the faithful also take part. [4]

Those who are charged with responsibility for the liturgical reform are particularly anxious to achieve this difficult objective. To that end, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship appeals once again, as they have often done in the past, for the proper development of singing by the faithful.

. . . [T]he liturgical reform does not and indeed cannot deny the past. Rather does it “preserve and foster it with the greatest care.” [7] It cultivates and transmits all that is in it of high religious, cultural and artistic worth and especially those elements which can express even externally the unity of believers. This minimum repertoire of Gregorian chant has been prepared with that purpose in mind: to make it easier for Christians to achieve unity and spiritual harmony with their brothers and with the living traditions of the past. Hence it is that those who are trying to improve the quality of congregational singing cannot refuse to Gregorian chant the place which is due to it. And this becomes all the more imperative as we approach the Holy Year of 1975, during which the faithful of different languages, nations and origins, will find themselves side by side for the common celebration of the Lord.

. . . In presenting the Holy Father’s gift to you, may I at the same time remind you of the desire which he has often expressed that the Conciliar constitution on the liturgy be increasingly better implemented. Would you therefore, in collaboration with the competent diocesan and national agencies for the liturgy, sacred music and catechetics, decide on the best ways of teaching the faithful the Latin chants of “Jubilate Deo” and of having them sing them, and also of promoting the preservation and execution of Gregorian chant in the communities mentioned above. You will thus be performing a new service for the Church in the domain of liturgical renewal.
The contents of this booklet may be reproduced free of charge. To help people understand these texts, one may add the normal vernacular translation.
AD LIMINA ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES
“ON ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY”
October 9, 1998

Discourse of the Holy Father to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of the United States of America (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska) at their Ad Limina visit

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. With fraternal love in the Lord I welcome you, the Pastors of the Church in the Northwestern United States, on the occasion of your ad Limina visit. This series of visits by the Bishops of your country to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and to the Successor of Peter and his collaborators in the service of the universal Church, is taking place while the whole People of God is preparing to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and enter a new Christian Millennium. The two thousandth anniversary of the Birth of the Savior is a call to all Christ’s followers to seek a genuine conversion to God and a great advance in holiness. Since the liturgy is such a central part of the Christian life, I wish today to consider some aspects of the liturgical renewal so vigorously promoted by the Second Vatican Council as the prime agent of the wider renewal of Catholic life.

To look back over what has been done in the field of liturgical renewal in the years since the Council is, first, to see many reasons for giving heartfelt thanks and praise to the Most Holy Trinity for the marvelous awareness which has developed among the faithful of their role and responsibility in this priestly work of Christ and his Church. It is also to realize that not all changes have always and everywhere been accompanied by the necessary explanation and catechesis; as a result, in some cases there has been a misunderstanding of the very nature of the liturgy, leading to abuses, polarization, and sometimes even grave scandal. After the experience of more than thirty years of liturgical renewal, we are well placed to assess both the strengths and weaknesses of what has been done, in order more confidently to plot our course into the future which God has in mind for his cherished People.

2. The challenge now is to move beyond whatever misunderstandings there have been and to reach the proper point of balance, especially by entering more deeply into the contemplative dimension of worship, which includes the sense of awe, reverence and adoration which are fundamental attitudes in our relationship with God.

This will happen only if we recognize that the liturgy has dimensions both local and universal, time-bound and eternal, horizontal and vertical, subjective and objective. It is precisely these tensions which give to Catholic worship its distinctive character. The universal Church is united in the one great act of praise; but it is always the worship of a particular community in a particular culture. It is the eternal worship of Heaven, but it is also steeped in time. It gathers and builds a human community, but it is also the worship of the Divine Majesty (Sacerdactum Concilium, 33). It is subjective in that it depends radically upon what the worshippers bring to it; but it is objective in that it transcends them as the priestly act of Christ himself, to which he associates us but
which ultimately does not depend upon us (ibid., 7). This is why it is so important that liturgical law be respected. The priest, who is the servant of the liturgy, not its inventor or producer, has a particular responsibility in this regard, lest he empty liturgy of its true meaning or obscure its sacred character. The core of the mystery of Christian worship is the sacrifice of Christ offered to the Father and the work of the Risen Christ who sanctifies his People through the liturgical signs. It is therefore essential that in seeking to enter more deeply into the contemplative depths of worship the inexhaustible mystery of the priesthood of Jesus Christ be fully acknowledged and respected. While all the baptized share in that one priesthood of Christ, not all share in it in the same manner. The ministerial priesthood, rooted in Apostolic Succession, confers on the ordained priest faculties and responsibilities which are different from those of the laity but which are at the service of the common priesthood and are directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1547). The priest therefore is not just one who presides, but one who acts in the person of Christ.

3. Only by being radically faithful to this doctrinal foundation can we avoid one-dimensional and unilateral interpretations of the Council’s teaching. The sharing of all the baptized in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ is the key to understanding the Council’s call for full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14). Full participation certainly means that every member of the community has a part to play in the liturgy; and in this respect a great deal has been achieved in parishes and communities across your land. But full participation does not mean that everyone does everything, since this would lead to a clericalizing of the laity and a laicizing of the priesthood; and this was not what the Council had in mind. The liturgy, like the Church, is intended to be hierarchical and polyphonic, respecting the different roles assigned by Christ and allowing all the different voices to blend in one great hymn of praise.

Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it. Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active. In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty. Here we see how the liturgy, though it must always be properly inculcated, must also be counter-cultural.

Conscious participation calls for the entire community to be properly instructed in the mysteries of the liturgy, lest the experience of worship degenerate into a form of ritualism. But it does not mean a constant attempt within the liturgy itself to make the implicit explicit, since this often leads to a verbosity and informality which are alien to the Roman Rite and end by trivializing the act of worship. Nor does it mean the suppression of all subconscious experience, which is vital in a liturgy which thrives on symbols that speak to the subconscious just as they speak to the conscious. The use of the vernacular has certainly opened up the treasures of the liturgy to all who take part, but this does not mean that the Latin language, and especially the chants which are so
superbly adapted to the genius of the Roman Rite, should be wholly abandoned. If subconscious experience is ignored in worship, an affective and devotional vacuum is created and the liturgy can become not only too verbal but also too cerebral. Yet the Roman Rite is again distinctive in the balance it strikes between a spareness and a richness of emotion: it feeds the heart and the mind, the body and the soul. It has been written with good reason that in the history of the Church all true renewal has been linked to a re-reading of the Church Fathers. And what is true in general is true of the liturgy in particular. The Fathers were pastors with a burning zeal for the task of spreading the Gospel; and therefore they were profoundly interested in all the dimensions of worship, leaving us some of the most significant and enduring texts of the Christian tradition, which are anything but the result of a barren aestheticism. The Fathers were ardent preachers, and it is hard to imagine that there can be an effective renewal of Catholic preaching, as the Council wished, without sufficient familiarity with the Patristic tradition. The Council promoted a move to a homiletic mode of preaching which would, like the Fathers, expound the biblical text in a way which opens its inexhaustible riches to the faithful. The importance that preaching has assumed in Catholic worship since the Council means that priests and deacons should be trained to make good use of the Bible. But this also involves familiarity with the whole Patristic, theological and moral tradition, as well as a penetrating knowledge of their communities and of society in general. Otherwise the impression is given of a teaching without roots and without the universal application inherent in the Gospel message. The excellent synthesis of the Church’s doctrinal wealth contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church has yet to be more widely felt as an influence on Catholic preaching.

4. It is essential to keep clearly in mind that the liturgy is intimately linked to the Church’s mission to evangelize. If the two do not go hand in hand, both will falter. Insofar as developments in liturgical renewal are superficial or unbalanced, our energies for a new evangelization will be compromised; and insofar as our vision falls short of the new evangelization our liturgical renewal will be reduced to external and possibly unsound adaptation. The Roman Rite has always been a form of worship that looks to mission. This is why it is comparatively brief: there was much to be done outside the church; and this is why we have the dismissal Ite, missa est, which gives us the term Mass: the community is sent forth to evangelize the world in obedience to Christ’s command (cf. Mt 28:19-20).

As Pastors, you are fully aware of the great thirst for God and the desire for prayer which people feel today. The World Youth Day in Denver stands out as evidence that the younger generation of Americans too yearns for a deep and demanding faith in Jesus Christ. They want to have an active role in the Church, and to be sent out in the name of Christ to evangelize and transform the world around them. Young people are ready to commit themselves to the Gospel message if it is presented in all its nobility and liberating force. They will continue to take an active part in the liturgy if they experience it as capable of leading them to a deep personal relationship with God; and it is from this experience that there will come priestly and religious vocations marked by true evangelical and missionary energy. In this sense the young are summoning the whole Church to take the next step in implementing the vision of worship which the Council has bequeathed to us. Unburdened by the ideological agenda of an earlier time, they are able to speak simply and directly of their desire to experience God, especially in
prayer both public and private. In listening to them, dear Brothers, we may well hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev 2:11).

5. In our preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the year 1999 will be devoted to the Person of the Father and to the celebration of his merciful love. Initiatives for next year should draw particular attention to the nature of the Christian life as “a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father, whose unconditional love for every human creature, and in particular for the prodigal son, we discover anew each day” (Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 49). At the core of this experience of pilgrimage is our journey as sinners into the unfathomable depths of the Church’s liturgy, the liturgy of Creation, the liturgy of Heaven all of which are in the end the worship of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Priest, in whom the Church and all creation are drawn into the life of the Most Holy Trinity, our true home. That is the purpose of all our worship and all our evangelizing.

At the very heart of the worshipping community, we find the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, who, from the depths of her contemplative faith, brings forth the Good News, which is Jesus Christ himself. Together with you I pray that American Catholics when they celebrate the liturgy will have in their hearts the same song that she sang: “My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my Savior.... He who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is his name” (Lk 1:46-50).

In entrusting the priests, religious and lay faithful of your Dioceses to the Blessed Mother’s loving protection, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.
GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL
2002

41. All other things being equal, Gregorian chant holds pride of place because it is
proper to the Roman Liturgy. Other types of sacred music, in particular polyphony, are
in no way excluded, provided that they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action
and that they foster the participation of all the faithful. 50 Since faithful from different
countries come together ever more frequently, it is fitting that they know how to sing
together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the Creed
and the Lord’s Prayer, set to the simpler melodies.

47. After the people have gathered, the Entrance chant begins as the priest enters with
the deacon and ministers. The purpose of this chant is to open the celebration, foster
the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of
the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and
ministers.

48. The singing at this time is done either alternately by the choir and the people or in a
similar way by the cantor and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone.
In the dioceses of the United States of America there are four options for the Entrance
Chant: (1) the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the Psalm from the Roman Gradual
as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the seasonal antiphon and
Psalm of the Simple Gradual; (3) a song from another collection of psalms and
antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including
psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) a suitable liturgical song similarly
approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop. 55 If there is no singing
at the entrance, the antiphon in the Missal is recited either by the faithful, or by some
of them, or by a lector; otherwise, it is recited by the priest himself, who may even adapt
it as an introductory explanation (cf. above, no. 31).

The Kyrie Eleison
52. After the Act of Penitence, the Kyrie is always begun, unless it has already been
included as part of the Act of Penitence. Since it is a chant by which the faithful acclaim
the Lord and implore his mercy, it is ordinarily done by all, that is, by the people and
with the choir or cantor having a part in it. As a rule, each acclamation is sung or said
twice, though it may be repeated several times, by reason of the character of the various
languages, as well as of the artistry of the music or of other circumstances. When the
Kyrie is sung as a part of the Act of Penitence, a trope may precede each acclamation.

The Gloria
53. The Gloria is a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered
together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. The
text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other text. The Gloria is intoned by the
priest or, if appropriate, by a cantor or by the choir; but it is sung either by everyone
together, or by the people alternately with the choir, or by the choir alone. If not sung,
it is to be recited either by all together or by two parts of the congregation responding
one to the other. It is sung or said on Sundays outside the Seasons of Advent and Lent,
on solemnities and feasts, and at special celebrations of a more solemn character. It is
preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people’s response is
concerned. Hence, the psalmist, or the cantor of the Psalm, sings the verses of the Psalm from the ambo or another suitable place. The entire congregation remains seated and listens but, as a rule, takes part by singing the response, except when the Psalm is sung straight through without a response. In order, however, that the people may be able to sing the Psalm response more readily, texts of some responses and Psalms have been chosen for the various seasons of the year or for the various categories of Saints. These may be used in place of the text corresponding to the reading whenever the Psalm is sung. If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God. In the dioceses of the United States of America, the following may also be sung in place of the Psalm assigned in the _Lectionary for Mass_: either the proper or seasonal antiphon and Psalm from the _Lectionary_, as found either in the _Roman Gradual_ or _Simple Gradual_ or in another musical setting; or an antiphon and Psalm from another collection of the psalms and antiphons, including psalms arranged in metrical form, providing that they have been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the responsorial Psalm.

86. While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant is begun. Its purpose is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the "communitarian" nature of the procession to receive Communion. The singing is continued for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful. If, however, there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion chant should be ended in a timely manner. Care should be taken that singers, too, can receive Communion with ease.

87. In the dioceses of the United States of America there are four options for the Communion chant: (1) the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the Psalm from the _Roman Gradual_ as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the seasonal antiphon and Psalm of the _Simple Gradual_; (3) a song from another collection of psalms and antiphons, approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) a suitable liturgical song chosen in accordance with no. 86 above. This is sung either by the choir alone or by the choir or cantor with the people. If there is no singing, however, the Communion antiphon found in the Missal may be recited either by the faithful, or by some of them, or by a lector. Otherwise the priest himself says it after he has received Communion and before he distributes Communion to the faithful.
3. On various occasions I too have recalled the precious role and great importance of music and song for a more active and intense participation in liturgical celebrations[9]. I have also stressed the need to “purify worship from ugliness of style, from distasteful forms of expression, from uninspired musical texts which are not worthy of the great act that is being celebrated”[10], to guarantee dignity and excellence to liturgical compositions. . . .

4. In continuity with the teachings of St Pius X and the Second Vatican Council, it is necessary first of all to emphasize that music destined for sacred rites must have holiness as its reference point: indeed, “sacred music increases in holiness to the degree that it is intimately linked with liturgical action”[11]. For this very reason, “not all without distinction that is outside the temple (profanum) is fit to cross its threshold”, my venerable Predecessor Paul VI wisely said, commenting on a Decree of the Council of Trent[12]. And he explained that “if music - instrumental and vocal - does not possess at the same time the sense of prayer, dignity and beauty, it precludes the entry into the sphere of the sacred and the religious”[13]. Today, moreover, the meaning of the category “sacred music” has been broadened to include repertoires that cannot be part of the celebration without violating the spirit and norms of the Liturgy itself.

St Pius X’s reform aimed specifically at purifying Church music from the contamination of profane theatrical music that in many countries had polluted the repertoire and musical praxis of the Liturgy. In our day too, careful thought, as I emphasized in the Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia, should be given to the fact that not all the expressions of figurative art or of music are able “to express adequately the mystery grasped in the fullness of the Church’s faith”[14]. Consequently, not all forms of music can be considered suitable for liturgical celebrations.

7. Among the musical expressions that correspond best with the qualities demanded by the notion of sacred music, especially liturgical music, Gregorian chant has a special place. The Second Vatican Council recognized that “being specially suited to the Roman Liturgy”[17] it should be given, other things being equal, pride of place in liturgical services sung in Latin[18]. St Pius X pointed out that the Church had “inherited it from the Fathers of the Church”, that she has “jealously guarded [it] for centuries in her liturgical codices” and still “proposes it to the faithful” as her own, considering it “the supreme model of sacred music”[19]. Thus, Gregorian chant continues also today to be an element of unity in the Roman Liturgy.

Like St Pius X, the Second Vatican Council also recognized that “other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations”[20]. It is therefore necessary to pay special attention to the new musical expressions to ascertain whether they too can express the inexhaustible riches of the Mystery proposed in the Liturgy and thereby encourage the active participation of the faithful in celebrations[21].
42. In the ars celebrandi, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. (126) St. Augustine rightly says in a famous sermon that “the new man sings a new song. Singing is an expression of joy and, if we consider the matter, an expression of love” (127). The People of God assembled for the liturgy sings the praises of God. In the course of her 2,000-year history, the Church has created, and still creates, music and songs which represent a rich patrimony of faith and love. This heritage must not be lost.

Certainly as far as the liturgy is concerned, we cannot say that one song is as good as another. Generic improvisation or the introduction of musical genres which fail to respect the meaning of the liturgy should be avoided. As an element of the liturgy, song should be well integrated into the overall celebration (128).

Consequently everything—texts, music, execution—ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, the structure of the rite and the liturgical seasons (129).

Finally, while respecting various styles and different and highly praiseworthy traditions, I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed (130) as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy (131).