Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Over the past two weeks, I discussed with Benjamin Phillips, our Organist and Choirmaster, the requirements for sacred music according to the Church's teaching. Benjamin pointed out that true Sacred music must possess the qualities of Sanctity, Intrinsic Beauty and Universality., and that Gregorian Chant and Classical Polyphony possess these qualities in the highest degree. However, these forms of music are normally sung by the choir. So, I asked Benjamin if there were any forms of music that the people in the pews are supposed to sing.

BP: Yes, the people are invited to join in the music of the Church by singing the Ordinary of the Mass and the Hymns.

Fr. DL: To simplify, what does "Ordinary of the Mass" mean?

BP: The Ordinary of the Mass are the core elements of the liturgy that stay the same: the Kyrie, Gloria, responses before and after the Gospel, Sanctus, Mystery of Faith, Lord's Prayer, Agnus Dei, as well as "Amen" to all the prayers. It appears that the People sang these parts heartily from memory in the early Church. The musical documents produced from the Second Vatican Council clearly indicate a desire to restore the hearty singing of these parts to the people, not just the choir.

Fr. DL: In addition to the Ordinary of the Mass, how are we supposed to incorporate hymns into the Mass?

BP: We must first realize that hymns are not *native* to the Mass. Hymns were popularized by St. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, as a way for the people to participate more fully in the principal hours of the Divine Office, Lauds and Vespers, which were celebrated publicly every day in city churches and cathedrals back in the fourth century.

Fr. DL: If hymns were originally written for the Divine Office, how did they come to be sung at Mass?

BP: It appears that hymns became more common at Mass as a substitute for the Proper of the Mass.

Fr. DL: We just discussed the Ordinary of the Mass. What is the Proper of the Mass?

BP: The Proper of the Mass are the parts that change from week to week: the Entrance antiphon, Responsorial Psalm, Alleluia verse, Offertory antiphon, and Communion antiphon. These are Gregorian chants normally taken directly from Scripture that serve as a commentary on the main Scripture readings of the day. They are supposed to be sung by the choir. However, the truth is that most parishes around the world are not blessed with choirs, and if they are, those choirs may not be capable of performing chant well. With the switch from exclusively Latin to the vernacular in the liturgy after Vatican 2, a vernacular replacement for the Propers had to be supplied. Since hymns are written in the vernacular and are frequently based on Scripture, they formed the perfect substitute for the old Latin Propers.

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Fr. DL: Do you feel that it was a positive development for hymns to take such a prominent place in the liturgy today?

BP: Yes, I do, for the following two reasons. First, the documents of Vatican 2 allow for some minor adaptation of the liturgy within different cultures. Hymns are common in our English-speaking religious culture, so if any adaptations in the music were desired, hymns would be the logical candidate. Second, since hymns are frequently based on Scripture, they are extremely valuable in catechesis. For every Sunday, I always try my best to choose hymns that help explain the Scripture readings—to "bring home" the point.

Fr. DL: I agree, and I think we have a good balance of Hymns and Propers here at OLR. In fact, one could say that musically, we are a "both/and" parish. At the 10:30 a.m. Mass on Sundays, the Choir sings the Entrance antiphon, AND the People sing a hymn. At the Offertory, the Choir sings a motet, AND the People sing a hymn. During Communion, the Choir sings the Communion antiphon and appropriate motets, AND the People sing the Post-Communion hymn.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker