Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We talk a lot about the truth, beauty, and goodness of our Catholic faith here at OLR. We are proud of the beauty of our worship, and a crucial part of the worship is our sacred music. To "sing to the Lord" is the most frequent command in Scripture, appearing over 50 times. There is no disagreement on the fact that we should sing, but much ink has been spilt discussing ***what kind*** of music we should sing.

There is a whole range of musical styles performed and offered in different Catholic parishes. Is one style of music better than another? Are there principles to establish what is best music for the Catholic liturgy?

To help clarify our thinking on the matter I spoke with Benjamin Phillips, our excellent organist and choirmaster.

Fr DL: **Where do we turn to learn about "proper" music for the Catholic worship?**

BP: The Church's teachings on sacred music were clearly delineated by St. Pope Pius X in his 1903 papal letter entitled *Tra Le Sollecitudini*, and in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* promulgated in 1963 by Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council.

From these documents, we see that sacred music must possess three qualities: Sanctity, Intrinsic beauty, and Universality.

FR DL: **That sounds lofty in theory. What does it actually mean, in practice?**

BP: Sanctity means holiness. St. Pope Pius X wrote, "[Sacred music] must be holy, and must, therefore, exclude all profanity not only in itself, but in the manner in which it is presented by those who execute it." I think this rules out all styles of music associated with Hollywood, Broadway or pop culture. Those styles are too often profane meaning sentimental, sexual or sensational—focusing more on entertainment than divine worship.

Fr DL: **How can you define "Intrinsic Beauty"?**

BP: Intrinsic beauty could also be called Goodness of Form. St. Pope Pius X said that Sacred Music must be true art, that is, it must be artistically sound. Pope Benedict XVI said that "nothing can be too beautiful for God, who himself is infinite beauty." This is often a choice of musical professionals who can discern better the quality of (or not) of a particular piece of music.

Fr DL: **What about "universality"?**

BP: the Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample, Archbishop of Portland, "means that any composition of sacred music, even one which reflects the unique culture of a particular region, would still be easily recognized as having a sacred character. The quality of holiness, in other words, is a universal principle that transcends culture". In other words, "I can't define it, but I know it when I hear it." Most people know instinctively whether a piece of music is transcendent and opens their heart and mind to the Lord, and when it does not achieve that aim.

Next week, we will explore what types of sacred music fulfill these qualities.

Your Pastor,
Fr Longenecker