

The Liturgical – Musical – Pastoral Criterion

There are three long-held principles that help us to choose the most appropriate music (cf. Pope John Paul II's Chirograph on Sacred Music, 4-6; *Musicam Sacram*, 5; and Pope Pius X's *Tra Le Sollecitudini*, 2, 7-9, 22-23):

1. Liturgically, it must be holy

To be holy, the music must serve the spirit and norms of the liturgy and the faith it expresses.

Is it closely connected with the liturgical action?

Not all music is suitable. Even some so-called Sacred Music "cannot be part of the celebration without violating the spirit and norms of the liturgy itself" (Chirograph, 4). To be closely connected to the liturgical action, "the meaning and the proper nature of each part and of each song" must be carefully observed (MS 6). These norms are detailed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) and *Musicam Sacram* (MS). The relevant paragraphs are summarised in the table on page 6.

Does it express the Church's faith and teaching?

The text should be based on appropriate scriptural or liturgical texts. It should refer to God in the persons of the Trinity. It should express the nature of the Church as the People of God and the Body of Christ. It must not conflict with the catechetical teaching and tradition of the Church.

2. Musically, it must be beautiful

Much of the beauty of liturgical music is in its apt suitability to liturgical prayer.

Does it possess sound form?

The melodic range and contour, the harmony, rhythm and tempo must be aptly suited to singing by the intended music ministers – priest, cantor, *schola* (choir) and assembly. The form of song must be aptly suited to the particular part of the liturgy – cantillation (for prayers, readings and proclamations), dialogue, acclamation, litany, responsorial psalm, processional antiphon or song with repeating refrain, or hymn (see page 3).

Is it true art?

It must have enduring appeal, able to bear the weight of repeated singing over time.

Does it fully adhere to the text it presents?

It must suitably embody the text of the liturgy. Prescribed texts must be used without variation. Where texts are not prescribed, "they must be in keeping with the parts of the Mass, the feast or the liturgical season" (MS 36).

Does it synchronise with the intended time and moment in the liturgy?

The music should be synchronised to begin and end at the times specified by the rite. "The various moments in the Liturgy require a musical expression of their own. From time to time this must fittingly bring out the nature proper to a specific rite, now proclaiming God's marvels, now expressing praise, supplication or even sorrow" (Chirograph, 5).

Does it reflect the gestures of the rite?

It must be aptly suited to any gestures, actions or processions it accompanies (e.g. the breaking of the bread, the procession and presentation of the gifts).

3. Pastorally, it must be universal

The music must be suited to the particular assembly while respecting the need for universal appeal.

Does it comply with the legitimate demands for adaptation and inculturation?

The music should be in a language that is comprehensible to the majority (Chirograph, 6). There are many local cultural adaptations as well as special provisions for Masses with children and other special groups that must be considered. Your parish priest is best placed to discern what adaptations are applicable for a given situation.