

## Resources: The *Roman Missal*

# Chanting the Simple Dialogues at Mass: Not Just for Priests Who “Like to Sing”

By CHARLES GARDNER

*As part of its formation effort to prepare for the new English translation of the Roman Missal, the National Association of Pastoral Musicians offers printed catechetical and pastoral materials on the Mass and the use of the missal. That effort began with the May issue of Pastoral Music and the NPM Publications book based on it: Why We SING What We Sing and DO What We Do at Mass. This article is the first of an occasional series of articles that will suggest practical pastoral ways to use the resources of the missal in worship.*

The introduction of the revised translation of the *Roman Missal* presents both challenges and opportunities. One of the opportunities it offers is a chance to introduce the chanting of the simple dialogues—especially those between the priest and the rest of the assembly. But it is possible that the majority of priests in the United States will not take advantage of this opportunity because they do not normally sing the Preface or the other presidential prayers of the liturgy now—because they “cannot sing” or because singing these texts “makes the Mass too long” or for some other reason—and they are likely to assign the sung dialogues along with the longer texts meant for singing to that minority of priests “who like to sing.”

Even though they both involve singing, the chanting of extended prayers and the chanting of simple dialogues have different purposes and dynamics. The chanting of a prayer involves only the

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priest and his decision, given the nature of the text, about how most effectively to proclaim a text using his particular gifts and talents and the options provided in the missal. But the chanting of a dialogue involves both priest and congregation in a dynamic exchange. The chanting of prayers and longer texts may be limited by ability, preference, or occasion, but the chanting of the dialogues should be a part of almost every Mass.

Even though this practice has been encouraged in most official liturgical documents, it is not common in most of our parishes—with the exception of the concluding doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, which is frequently chanted. One of the reasons for this might be that the highly influential document *Music in Catholic Worship* (1972) did not encourage or even mention chanting the dialogues. However, its successor, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL, 2007) highly recommends it:

Among the parts to be sung, preference should be given “especially to those to be sung by the priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding. . . .” This includes dialogues such as . . . *The Lord be with you. And also with you.*

The dialogues of the Liturgy are fundamental because they “are not simply outward signs of communal celebration but foster and bring about communion between priest and people.” By their nature, they are short and uncomplicated and easily invite active participation by the entire assembly.

Every effort should therefore be made to introduce or strengthen as a normative practice the singing of the dialogues. . . . Even the priest with a very limited

singing ability is capable of chanting *The Lord be with you* on a single pitch (STL, 115; internal quotations are from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 34 and 40).

Here is a list of these dialogues during the Mass:

### INTRODUCTORY RITES

1. Sign of the Cross and Greeting (Priest);
2. Conclusion to the Opening Prayer (Priest);

### LITURGY OF THE WORD

3. Acclamation and Response after the Reading(s) (Lector or Cantor);
4. Gospel: Introductory Dialogue and Concluding Acclamation/Response (Deacon or Priest);

### LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: PRIEST

5. Conclusion to the Prayer over the Gifts;
6. Preface: Opening Dialogue;
7. Eucharistic Prayer: Concluding Doxology/Amen;
8. Prayer for Peace: Concluding Dialogue;
9. Conclusion to the Prayer after Communion;

### CONCLUDING RITES

10. Greeting and Blessing (Priest);
11. Dismissal (Deacon or Priest).

Note: The revised *Roman Missal* also provides chants for the *Orate Fratres* and the Invitation to Communion, but this list does not include them because their responses are considerably longer and more complex than the other dialogues.

## What We're Not Talking About

1. We are not expecting the priest (or the deacon or lector) to sound like the psalmist or the cantor. This is a different ministry, and the music assigned to the psalmist and cantor is often more demanding. That is why it is probably better to use the term "chanting" rather than "singing" when referring to the dialogues. And to a priest or deacon who says, "I can't (or won't) sing," a good response would be: "But you can (and should) chant. If you can speak, you can chant!"

2. As mentioned above, we are not expecting *all* priests to chant the more extended texts of the Preface and the other presidential prayers, even though some may choose to do so depending on nature of the text and the occasion. This is a crucial point. The key question for the priest is: "How can I best *proclaim* these prayers: by chanting or by spoken proclamation?" Some commentators have noted that the more formal style of the revised translation may lend itself to chanting, while others have pointed out that the long sentences may instead demand more nuanced spoken proclamation.

*Sing to the Lord* also makes it clear that, since they involve dialogues, the conclusions to the Opening Prayer, Prayer over the Gifts, and Prayer after Communion may be chanted, even if the prayers themselves are recited (STL, 151, 175, 197). This practice of chanting the conclusion of a spoken prayer is already common practice for the conclusion to the Eucharistic Prayer.

3. We are not *necessarily* talking about using the dialogue chants exactly as they will appear in the main body of the revised missal. Even now, some priests do use the chant for the concluding doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer just as it appears in the current *Sacramentary*, since it is similar to the tone used for the Preface. But many more use a simpler chant (see next column).

This is similar to what is called the "simple tone" that appears (and will appear) in the *Appendix* of the Missal and is often used by those who chant the opening prayer (collect) and other presidential prayers. For the most part, it involves chanting on "a single pitch" as described in *Sing to the Lord*, with just two slight variations:

- a slight downward "turn and return" midway through the phrase ("Holy Spirit");



Cardinal Daniel DiNardo chants the Preface dialogue during the 2009 NPM National Convention.

- a downward "fall" at the conclusion (a descending minor third; the "doorbell" interval).

*If a priest can chant this simple doxology—or something close to it—he can also chant any dialogue using the "simple tone."*

This tone also has the advantage of providing an easier response for the rest of the assembly. Except for the *Amen* that stays on a single pitch, the tonal pattern of the response is usually in the form of a simple "echo."

### Common Objections to Chanting the Dialogues

1. *It seems "unnatural."* For those not used to the practice, it will take some getting used to. In some ways, this is a cultural issue: We do not normally chant such texts in other contexts (except for those who chant "Hello" or "Where are you?" without realizing that they are

chanting). But neither do we normally wear special clothing dating from Roman times apart from Mass and other liturgies. And remember once more that we are not necessarily talking about chanting extended texts.

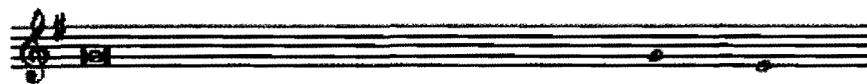
2. *It is too formal.* Our liturgy is more formal than informal. This has been a difficult lesson for some people to learn after the sometimes casual approach to the reformed liturgy following the Second Vatican Council. The liturgy is no one's "property." It is the action of Christ and his Body, the Church. It demands a measure of propriety and formality.

3. *It draws too much attention to the priest.* Once the priest and the congregation get used to the practice, they will likely experience just the opposite. The chanting will put them on a more "equal footing" and draw them closer in unity.

4. *It excludes some of the people who will not (or cannot) sing.* Again, a person who can speak can also sing—or at least



Through Him, with Him, in Him in the unity of the Ho - ly Spir - it.



All glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, forever and ev - er.

chant—even if it is not exactly “on pitch.” When we ask our people to sing together, we are challenging them to do something quite countercultural. In our society, we too readily divide people into singers (“performers”) and non-singers (“audience”). Nevertheless, even those who will not pick up a song book will usually manage to chant a simple *Amen* or *And with your spirit*.

## Reasons for Chanting the Dialogues

1. *It helps our communal prayer to be more intentional and “on purpose.”* Generally, it takes more breath and energy to chant a dialogue than it does to speak it.

2. *It helps our communal response to be stronger and more sustained.* Even in a large group, a spoken response such as *Amen* or *We lift them up to the Lord* can come across as a weak mumble. Chanting can give these responses more strength and

“weight.”

3. *It unifies our response.* Have you ever stood next to someone in church who always finishes the spoken responses before everyone else? It is much harder to do this when chanting. Also, people naturally speak on a variety of pitch levels, but when they chant, the pitches are the same—at least for the most part! Many voices become one.

4. *It will assist in the introduction of the revised texts.* This is a very practical reason. When implementing the revised missal, if a priest or a deacon who normally recites *The Lord be with you* begins to chant it instead, this can help to signal and facilitate the change in the people’s response. Chanting also lends itself to the more “formal” nature of the revised response *And with your spirit*.

5. *It helps to “foster and bring about communion between priest and people.”* (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 34). When the dialogues are spoken, the sound of the

people’s response is usually quite different from the priest’s proclamation. Most priests attempt to proclaim strongly using an “elevated” pitch in their speech, but the people usually respond in a weaker voice and on a lower pitch level. Chanting enables the proclamation and the response to be more closely matched, both in strength and in pitch level—to be more “in communion.” Far from distancing himself from the congregation, the priest who chants the dialogues is helping them to “give thanks to God and offer the spotless Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 95).

In short, chanting simple dialogues is not about whether priests, deacons, or readers like to sing or even sing particularly well. It is about helping the whole Body of Christ to celebrate the liturgy fully and together with strength and enthusiasm.

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