

THE EVANGELIZING POWER OF MUSIC

by Rev. Msgr. Richard Hilgartner

Church of the Magdalen

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Introduction: Msgr. Hilgartner and Fr. Shawn McKnight lived next to each other for about five years, while working at the Conference of Bishops. Msgr. Hilgartner was in the Office of Divine Worship, while Fr. McKnight was in the Office for Clergy and Religious Life and Vocations.

Msgr. Hilgartner was ordained in 1995 for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, served seven years in the Conference of Bishops. Some might say “tumultuous” years. He was there when the new Roman Missal in English came out. He was involved in educating the Catholics of the United States about the use of the new missal and its implementation. In fact, if you open up the Missal, you’ll find in the first pages Msgr. Hilgartner’s name.

Msgr. Hilgartner

“It’s an honor to be here with you tonight. ...I would dream of having acoustics like this in my parish—we have carpeting and cushioned pews and not quite a ceiling like this. But, we have a growing music program. It’s an exciting time! I’m a new pastor myself, and I’ve been in my parish since January. I’m in northern Baltimore county. It’s a large parish and it’s been undergoing a lot of transition...It’s an exciting time for me to be guiding them through some of that change. Part of the change is that my predecessor, the previous pastor, served there for 37 years. So, this is the first time that the parish has undergone a change in leadership since the mid-’70’s. Actually, they’ve been doing things one way for quite a long time. And, it’s been an exciting time to come in and succeed one of the wisdom figures in our diocese.

I have to admit this is my first real time in Kansas. I was in the Missouri side of Kansas City a number of years ago for a conference of priests. Some of the priests on the Kansas side came over and picked me up for dinner and we crossed the river to the Kansas side. That’s as close as I’ve come, so this is my first time really being in Kansas. I’m very happy to be here.

And, I’m very happy to be here, as the new Chapter of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians is really getting underway. I want to thank Sister Nylas and Fr. Shawn not only for allowing this to be a gathering of the musicians of the parish here, but to let this be something that the whole NPM chapter can be a part of. I want to ask the leadership of the NPM chapter to stand...

If you aren’t familiar with the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, since I am the president, we cannot not have a “commercial break.” We are an organization of more than 6,000 members, as a professional organization for Catholic church musicians in the United States. Many of our church musicians are also members of the American Guild of Organists, which is an interdenominational, actually, interfaith organization. But the National Association of Pastoral Musicians is recognized by the conference of

bishops as the official organization dedicated to fostering and serving music for the sacred liturgy in the United States. We provide formation for music directors. But, not only directors of music and professional musicians—certainly the professional core is an integral part of our Association. But many of our members are cantors, choir members, instrumentalists, and NPM is supportive of a wide spectrum—a full range of styles and structures of music and musical forms at the service of the liturgy for the church of the United States. I'm excited to be serving as the president, since I completed my term with the bishops' conference last year. So, I'm serving in a couple capacities. But speaking about music and music for the sacred liturgy, I can't help but wear my NPM hat.

I'm very happy tonight to be speaking about music and the liturgy. Let's get a sense of who's here....We all have a stake in this, and in many ways I'm "preaching to the choir." Because we are people involved in leading music and making music for the liturgy, I don't have to convince you of the value of music in the liturgy. I would probably do this presentation differently for the crowd at my parish at the Sunday morning, 7:30 a.m. Mass. That's the people that defy me to sing! Since it's a quiet Mass, we're the only parish in our area that has Mass without music on Sunday. It has a little bit of a following... But, we do have music on feast days, so on Christmas and Easter, they're gonna sing—and they're gonna sing for Christ the King—but they don't know that! Palm Sunday, Pentecost, major feast days.

But I don't have to convince you of the importance, the value, the role and function...I have some slides with quotes from different documents, just to remind us of what we're about in music. But I want to talk about the liturgy, but to set things, I want to talk about the Road to Emmaus. We always go to the Last Supper, where the Lord instituted the Eucharist, the priesthood. It's because of the Last Supper, of Holy Thursday, that we celebrate the liturgy and connect it to Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

But, our experience, when we celebrate the Mass, I think is more connected to the disciples' experience on the Road to Emmaus. Because their encounter with the Risen Lord is very much what our encounter is like.

There are four things (encounter, dialogue, gift, mission) that happen on the Road to Emmaus. The story should be in our bones!

Those disciples meet the Lord, but they don't know it's the Lord. The Lord meets them in their grief. It's after the Lord's death and burial and they're leaving Jerusalem. And the Gospel tells us that they're downcast. Now, just imagine that they're going back home to "pick up the pieces." They'd been following Jesus and they thought that he was the one who was to redeem Israel. And, maybe they were going back to face the music, that somehow, people were gonna laugh at them and say, Well, you all thought that, but look what happened...And they've got this encounter—the story has been told that he was risen. But, that's not quite sunk in for them. And so, they're still grieving and downcast. Jesus meets them there, and so they have this encounter when the Lord enters into their lives. And then he begins to teach them and enter into this

conversation and dialogue. And Jesus begins to break open the scriptures for them. And they realize that something's happening, so they urge him to stay with them. So, this encounter, this dialogue, is something that they're beginning to see is transforming them, but they can't name that. And then, Jesus reveals himself to them in the breaking of the bread and gives them this great gift, whereupon he vanishes from their sight. But, that's not the end, because what happens next is really the result of all of this: They are sent on mission, they turn around and return to Jerusalem to announce what they've experienced. And, in all of this, that whole event at Emmaus, was this transformative experience. And they meet the Lord in their conversation with him; he is giving himself to them as he breaks bread with them and re-orientes them for mission. They are changed! And in that, in these four steps, (encounter, dialogue, gift, mission), this is what happens in the liturgy.

As we meet the Lord, as the Lord enters our lives, he meets us 'where we're at,' gives us this great gift of himself, which then re-orientes us and shapes us for mission, because we are literally sent forth: Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord! Go in peace, glorifying God by your life!

Why do we celebrate Mass?

Pope Francis: "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak." *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 47.

We wouldn't come to the Eucharist if we didn't need something to be transformed, if we didn't need this encounter with the Lord in our lives.

The two aims of the Eucharist: to give glory to God and to make us holy—the glorification of God and the sanctification of the people—and both have to happen, if we're going to make sense of the liturgy.

The Second Vatican Council (1963) tells us that particularly the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, all the activity of the Church. Everything we do leads us to [the Eucharist] and all its power, all the Lord's grace, flows from it.

[T]he liturgy is the **summit** toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper. *Sacrosanctam Concilium*, #10 (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*)

[The Eucharist] is the goal of our day and our week ideally. Of course, I'm preaching to the choir. Choirs and ensembles and cantors—you're working through the week to prepare for Sunday! Those who proclaim the scriptures will be spending time with the word of God to prepare to proclaim it on Sunday.

It's the **source** of everything we experience with God's grace! So, we leave Sunday encouraged and transformed and built up and strengthened to do what we're called to do throughout the week.

Because it's in the liturgy, we discover what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ.

A couple of words about evangelization—a big buzz word... Sometimes people think that evangelization means going door to door or standing on the street corner. But, at its root, the word evangelization means handing on the Gospel, the *traditio Evangelii*. How evangelization happens, if we're handing on the Gospel, is the proclamation of the Gospel at the celebration of the liturgy. Because, one of the primary ways that we hear the Gospel proclaimed, where we first hear the Word, is when we celebrate the liturgy. The scriptures are an important part of the liturgy. We'll come back to that, because music is one of the ways in which we proclaim the word of God, in which we allow God's word to 'get' to us. So, evangelization, handing on the Gospel—the liturgy is a key point, a key moment.

Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 24:

[A]n evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization. Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness. The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving.

We celebrate Mass rather than say Mass, (or, the unfortunate term, "Father will *read* Mass"). People who are filled with the Gospel can't do anything *but* celebrate.

The Second Vatican Council says that liturgy builds us up. The liturgy is first for the Church, so that the Church can be sent forth to share that witness in the world, so that there's a movement within the Church in the liturgy, and then it flows out beyond the Church.

Sacrosanctam Concilium, #2

While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ at the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.

At the end of the day, this ancient Latin axiom, *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, says: What we pray is what we believe. I would add another piece to that—that it shapes how we live. There is a transformation taking place, where this encounter gives us something, and that we have to not just hoard it or take it and say, 'Oh, it's nice that we've been given something,' but putting that gift to the grace of the sacraments, the presence of Christ in us to its fullest potential, we have to do something with it, and that's the mission. That's that orientation to go out. That always has to happen.

Pope Francis is not really known as a liturgist. (Jesuits are known for their great spiritual wisdom and are great scholars—liturgy's not one of the things that they are known for). Pope Francis doesn't say a lot about the liturgy, and when he celebrates Mass, you notice that he's very intense and very quiet. Some people said that during last month's papal visit, 'Oh, he sounded so tired at Mass.' That's just his intensity; he allows the liturgy to do its thing without him getting in the way of it. So there's not a lot of fanfare, there's not a lot of hype. He's very low-key when he celebrates the liturgy. And, he's not said a whole lot about the liturgy. Although he did make that one point about the beauty of the liturgy.

This was a statement he made speaking to a gathering in commemoration of the Second Vatican Council's Liturgy Constitution in 2013:

"To celebrate true spiritual worship means to offer oneself as a living sacrifice, sacred and agreeable to God. A liturgy detached from spiritual worship would risk becoming empty, declining from its Christian originality to a generic sacred sense, almost magical, and a hollow aestheticism. As an action of Christ, liturgy has an inner impulse to be transformed in the sentiments of Christ, and in this dynamism all reality is transfigured."

This means that we must be open to that transformation. It can't just be this ritual that we've entered into, functions to do and things to do. There are times that we have roles to do and things to do. And it's easy in our ministries to get caught up in 'I have to do this right.' When you're a cantor, and you have a more difficult psalm that you're called to proclaim, you might be preoccupied all through the beginning part of Mass and you're not paying attention to that first reading, because you're worried about whether you're going to get that note or difficult rhythm right. Or, if the choir's going to be singing during or after communion, you might be distracted thinking, 'Oh, I hope I remember how that line goes or that I find that pitch.' It's easy to get preoccupied in the doing of the things. Pope Francis reminds us that the liturgy can't be separated from the inner, spiritual encounter. We always have to have that in mind.

Imbued with the Spirit

The Second Vatican Council essentially called us. All who have a role to play in the liturgical assembly have to be 'deeply imbued with the Spirit of the liturgy, **each in his own measure**, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner.' It is not as though to say, we can make this all spiritual and inner and not worry about doing things right. We still have to learn our parts, know our notes, know the texts. But there has to be this inner moment, to be imbued with the spirit of the liturgy. And the liturgy is ultimately about this act of self-offering. And so, everything we do has to be caught up in it.

How does music enable, strengthen this?

Pope Benedict and Pope Francis, too, refer to this—how the beauty of the liturgy evangelizes.

Pope Benedict refers to the *Ars Celebrandi*—the art of the celebration. He said that there were a number of things that contribute to a right celebration, so that beauty has a

way of touching hearts. It goes beyond simply an academic exercise. The ways in which we encounter beauty is, in part, how we encounter the divine—through beauty, because it inspires. There are a number of things that are a building block to this:

Our own participation *actuosa participatio*

The Rite—the structure itself—what we do: the rituals, the gestures

The Arts—(one can't help but be inspired walking into this space)

Liturgical Music in a particular way draws us in and leads us to that inner encounter so that that transformation can take place

Preaching has a place, because it builds the bridge and makes the connection and leads us to that offering of the self, where we can give ourselves over to Christ and Christ enters into us and we experience that transformation.

Catechesis has to be involved. We don't just bring strangers in who know nothing of what we do and expect them to be completely transformed by that. That's a challenge! We have all these evangelization programs, where we invite someone to come to church. But, if you invite someone who has never encountered God before or who hasn't really been touched by his presence or who doesn't know anything about who Jesus is, it's a vague way. But, if you were to bring someone in, who knew nothing of Christian faith and knew nothing of Catholic practice and the sacraments and you brought them into Mass, there might be some moments when they're caught up in the space; there might be a piece of music which touches them, but they're not gonna necessarily know the whole system of our symbolic ritual language and the whole world that we enter into in the signs and the sacramentals of the Church. If you had to explain: Oh see that bread and wine up there? They're gonna become the Lord's Body and Blood, they're gonna say, What? Have you ever tried to explain that to someone who didn't get it, e.g., a friend that's not Catholic, and they don't get it and you try to explain it? It's the mystery, the miracle of God's presence that sometimes is beyond explanation. We use all kinds of terms to describe it. But, it's difficult to get at, and at some point, there's that transformation that brings us into that world.

So, catechesis has to be part of this. On one level, we have the signs that speak, but we already have to be given the language in order for the signs to speak to us in a way they intend to speak.

Music and the Liturgy has several functions, and obviously there are some official functions:

Music in the liturgy has official functions

Communicates something about God, e.g. The psalm is one of the readings proclaimed

Sometimes we sing to God

Communicates the sentiment of our worship of God

Sometimes God's word is spoken to us

Makes connections

Joining our voices with God's word

Music has power to lead people to a transformative experience.

There is an intangible quality that manages to touch and inspire us.

Music and the Arts

People prefer this or that genre or style

Being a form of art, music is about beauty. Thus, sometimes there may be a less-than-tangible assessment

A favorite piece of music for funerals is "On Eagle's Wings." Even though it is hard to sing, people belt it out! It seems to be associated with memories, e.g., my grandmother loved that song.

Objective criteria

Why we sing:

Musicam Sacram was the post-Vatican II document from the Congregation of Rites, which, at the time, was undertaking the reform of the liturgy.

5. Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, with the ministers of each degree fulfilling their ministry and the people participating in it.

Indeed, through this form, prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.

This isn't just about structure for the sake of having to sing. The Council Fathers recognized that the liturgy is made more effective by its musical nature.

Musicam Sacram

15. The faithful fulfil 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,

(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.

The primary is what's going on internally, as we give ourselves over to Christ. But, our singing, and everything else we do is revealing, demonstrating and helping foster what's going on at the level of the heart. It's easy to have one or the other and not both. We may be deeply burdened, yet intensely active in the heart. And there can be plenty of other days, when we can be doing all the right things, and be completely separated from it, when we're doing all the actions, and not paying attention to what we're doing—completely preoccupied, in that sense.

Sing to the Lord (2007), an instruction from the U. S. bishops, offers guidelines on music in the sacred liturgy

2. A cry from deep within our being, music is a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things. As St. Augustine says, "Singing is for the one who loves." Music is therefore a sign of God's love for us and of our love for him. In this sense, it is very personal. But unless music sounds, it is not music, and whenever it sounds, it is accessible to others. By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension. Thus, it is no wonder that singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people.

5. Obedient to Christ and to the Church, we gather in liturgical assembly, week after week. As our predecessors did, we find ourselves "singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in [our] hearts to God." This common, sung expression of faith within liturgical celebrations strengthens our faith when it grows weak and draws us into the divinely inspired voice of the Church at prayer. Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it. Good music "make[s] the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive and fervent so that everyone can praise and beseech the Triune God more powerfully, more intently and more effectively."

Text ~ Structure ~ Style ~ Culture

What we sing and how we sing it: Text and structure sometimes dictate what we sing, e.g., The Gloria, the acclamations in the Eucharistic prayer—we don't have to think of what to sing, because the text is there; the liturgy dictates what we sing. There are other moments when the text is suggested. There are other options for what is sung at the entrance and what is sung at communion. There is an antiphon provided in the missal and in the Roman Gradual, but the rubrics in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* allow for other things to be substituted. And that goes back to *Musicam Sacram* from 1967, which suggested that hymnody, as a way of engaging people's song, might be a means to do that. Thus, an option for something other than the antiphon was introduced.

In what way are we going to sing? Will it be unaccompanied chant? Will it be accompanied singing? The culture of the people and their needs and abilities sometimes indicates that. The bigger parishes that have embarked on singing the proper antiphons that are prescribed in the Roman Missal—you have to have a priest who supports a music program, and chants that are easy to learn. But, even if a priest would like his parish to sing the proper antiphons, the community might not have

the people or the skills to have a different antiphon with a different melody every week. A small assembly that isn't led by a trained choir might rely on familiar melodies that can be repeated over and over again. Also, there may be texts that can be adapted to familiar, strophic hymn tunes. Music may also grow out of a community's own culture or ethnicity.

Judging what to sing: Musical, liturgical, pastoral judgment

Musical qualities that demonstrate that it is worthy of the liturgy

Liturgical judgment—Is it the right piece of music, the right text? Does it fit within the particular function of the liturgy at that moment? Is it something appropriate to sing during Holy Communion?

Pastoral judgment—Does this piece of music work for this assembly, for this occasion? Does it speak to these people and inspire them to worship?

These are questions that cannot always be answered in an objective, quick, simple way.

Sacred Liturgical Music (67-70)

Three dimensions that music has for the liturgy

Connection to liturgical action and structure

Proper texts

Spiritual dimension—

- Inner qualities add depth to prayer, unity to assembly, dignity to ritual
- Mediates the holiness of God, draws people into communion
The vertical dimension—music is somehow lifting us up and allowing us to experience the Lord entering into our lives
- Cultural context—How does this assembly respond? What are its particular needs? e.g., Music done in regular parish assembly will differ from that of a group of musicians or of a National Association of Pastoral Musicians convention gathering of 2000 musicians. (Next year's NPM convention will be in Houston the second week of July, offering educational and formational opportunities across a wide range of topics. Part of the experience is entering into worship each day: the Liturgy of the Hours and Mass with other like-minded and like-hearted people who have the skills to enter into a quality of singing that is unsurpassed).

When we look at all these different kinds of decisions, it opens up a whole range of things in how we sing and how we pray. And it comes back to:

Musicam Sacram # 11

It should be borne in mind that the true solemnity of liturgical worship depends less on a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial than on its worthy and religious celebration, which takes into account the integrity of the liturgical celebration itself, and the performance of each of its parts according to their own particular nature. To have a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial is at times desirable when there are the resources available to carry them out properly; on the other hand it would be contrary to the true solemnity of the liturgy

if this were to lead to a part of the action being omitted, changed, or improperly performed.

If music is disproportionately ornate or complex, it might throw things off a bit. Cautioning us that simplicity might be more appropriate.

Musicam Sacram #16. One cannot find anything more religious and more joyful in sacred celebrations than a whole congregation expressing its faith and devotion in song. *[One of the mottos of NPM is that we cherish the sound of the singing assembly above all other sounds].* Therefore the active participation of the whole people, which is shown in singing, is to be carefully promoted as follows:

(a) It should first of all include acclamations, responses to the greetings of the priest and ministers and to the prayers of litany form, and also antiphons and psalms, refrains or repeated responses, hymns and canticles.

(b) Through suitable instruction and practices, the people should be gradually led to a fuller—indeed, to a complete—participation in those parts of the singing which pertain to them.

(c) Some of the people's song, however, especially if the faithful have not yet been sufficiently instructed, or if musical settings for several voices are used, can be handed over to the choir alone, provided that the people are not excluded from those parts that concern them. But the usage of entrusting to the choir alone the entire singing of the whole Proper and of the whole Ordinary, to the complete exclusion of the people's participation in the singing, is to be deprecated.

Instruction, explanation

The aim of music within the liturgy. We can say that music is doing “this,” while the liturgy is doing something else. They have to be together. And if music trying to do something other than what the liturgy is trying to do, then something is off balance.

Scripture (gift)

Think of those four moments of the road to Emmaus. Essentially, music has a hand in all of that. Music helps us to hear God’s word. Sometimes, people challenge what we’re singing. Sometimes, we’re singing God’s words. The psalms and some of the antiphons from the missal do that, and that’s part of how we hear, internalize, and appropriate things, sometimes giving voice to them ourselves.

Example of how Dan Schutte wrote, “Here I Am, Lord,” with intention of us hearing God speak to us. The refrain comes as our response to what we hear God saying. Let the cantor sing “God’s part,” and the assembly sing the response to question, “Whom shall I send?” [Such illustrates] the cantor’s role and the assembly’s role in expressing how God speaks to us—dealing with the function of the text.

Inspire praise and thanksgiving—Music helps us get caught up in sacramental moments.

Think about the Eucharistic prayer, our highest form of praise and thanksgiving, how much it is driven musically: Whether it's the priest chanting those parts and giving substance to the proper texts... or the assembly's response, but this active praise and thanksgiving adds moments which are joined to this encounter.

Orientation for mission—when we are sent forth, to live in an ethical way—putting into practice what we experience. Music is sending us out and allowing all of that to happen. If music is not having the same function that the liturgy itself, then something is wrong.

Example of Pope Francis going to a parish in Rome, where Pope Paul VI had first celebrated the Mass in the vernacular—the first papal liturgy done in Italian. In off-the-cuff comments after the liturgy, he talked about how the liturgy has transformed us. e.g., Earlier people might say, “I don't want to be disturbed at Mass,” but the liturgy is about disturbance.

“What's in it for me?” becomes “Thy will be done.” The liturgy is shaping us for that—not just for prayer, but for when we go forth.

We go back to the Road to Emmaus. Where does it lead us? It's not, “Have a nice day! Thanks for coming!” but it's got to be this mission, this re-orientation for putting into practice and enacting what we've done ritually. *“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord. Go in peace, glorifying God with your life.”*

The bishops' document ends with this wonderful quote from St. Augustine: “You should sing as wayfarers do—sing, but continue your journey. Do not grow tired but sing with joy!” This reminds us that I'm not just singing to sing, but singing is about our walk with the Lord.

As we conclude tonight, I invite you to think about your singing and the Road to Emmaus. It doesn't say that the disciples sang that night. Maybe they did when they paused for a meal with the Lord and broke bread. But imagine what was in their hearts as they ran back to Jerusalem. They certainly had a song in their heart. They may have felt lifted up in a way that they might have [sung a song]. Singing is part of what we do, so I invite you to join those two ideas: your singing and the encounter at Emmaus. Recognize that you have the power to enable some of that profound amazement, because music has a way of leading us and touching our hearts. You have a chance to allow people's hearts to burn within them as they walk on the way with the Lord in the liturgy. You have the power to help create that moment of encounter, where the faithful's hearts burn within them. Never forget that responsibility. Take that seriously. Thanks for what you do and thanks for your time tonight.

Questions/comments

Question: You touched earlier on the “heavenly liturgy,” and I wondered if you could expound on that a little bit. I love the idea of us singing as in Revelation with all the people of heaven.

Answer: In the book of Revelation, there is the crowd that no one can count, but I also go back to the prophet Isaiah, with the image of the angels singing in the room and the frame over the door shakes as the people sing “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God of hosts!” That’s unmistakably heaven! I want to tell my “quiet” Mass—“Here’s heaven! There’s incense and there’s loud singing, such that the frame of the door shakes! So, if you like the quiet Mass, you’d better ready for something else in heaven...Incense and singing! But there’s always this sense that the Eucharist is for us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Eucharistic Prayer I of the Roman canon talks about our gifts being borne here by angels to the altar on high. So there’s this image of something that we do here is connected to something in heaven. It comes up in our liturgical texts, because it’s about “as we do this here, so may this prepare us for things eternal.” The Prayer after Communion often says: May what we have celebrated prepare us for those heavenly things. It’s an image of a banquet. We talk about the supper of the Lamb, the banquet of the Lamb.