

What is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is based on what the Church teaches about the Mass.

Most people don't have time to read the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, the main source for this leaflet, or don't know where to get hold of a copy, or might be put off by the look of it. So the information needed by those who lead the music, or those who simply want to know, is not widely enough available.

The Bishops' Church Music Committee has produced this leaflet to make it easier to absorb. It takes the official statement that 'singing at Mass is of great importance'¹ and applies it to the situations in which we find ourselves. Resources of time and people are in short supply in our parishes, and choices have to be made about where to put our energy. It is important to know what to choose, which parts, according to the Church, *should* be sung so that we can respond to the Word and give thanks to God most worthily.

If you ask people what the main sung parts of Mass are, many will say 'the hymns'. Hymns are all many people experience, so that is a reasonable answer. It can be a surprise to hear that to sing hymns at Mass is a quite recent development and that you could have a perfectly good sung Mass with *no* hymns.

The five columns are a way of showing this. The columns go from the most important parts (1) to the least (5). They serve as a checklist, so that if for instance you are not singing anything in columns 1 or 2 you need to re-assess your priorities. Some of the placings in 4 & 5 are recommendations rather than firm prescriptions, but overall this scheme provides a way of learning the 'shape' of the Mass so it can truly be an encounter with God.

Column 1 shows a Mass with no hymns. This lets us see the *most important* parts to sing: the Gospel Acclamation and the Acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer. Why these? Because they allow us to acclaim the presence of Christ in his Gospel and on the altar, at the two most solemn moments of the Mass.

Column 2 adds some more pieces to the basic core. The Opening Song is intended to unite us and open our hearts to hear God's voice. The Breaking of Bread and Communion songs express our unity in the Christ we receive. The Gloria allows us to express our praise as a community. The Psalm Response puts on our lips words that sum up the day's scripture.

Column 3 can be added next as opportunity permits. The Penitential Rite is particularly appropriate to sing in Lent and Advent when there is no Gloria. At the Preparation of the Gifts (no longer called 'Offertory') there may be a song, instrumental music or silence. The Final Song can send us out inspired but it isn't essential - it's not in the Missal!

Column 4 is getting into the sphere of dedication to duty! A priest needn't feel obliged to sing the Eucharistic Prayer but if he can do it sometimes he should. A sung response to the Intercessions can concentrate the minds of those praying.

Column 5 is for the angels.

¹ *General Instruction on the Roman Missal (2005), paragraph 40.*

Singing

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MASS

What parts of the Mass should be sung?
What is the purpose of each part?
Who does what, and when?

Music Committee of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales