



# CHANTING THE MASS

## A Message from Bishop Andrew Cozzens



*Diocese of*  
**CROOKSTON**

Singing is such a beautiful human activity. It is a powerful way to express emotions of the heart and to unite people in joy. Singing is a gift that God has given us so that we are able to lift the heart and mind to him. The Bible is filled with songs and singing has always been a part of worshipping God. In Hebrew, the word for "psalm" is "mizmor" (מִזְמוֹר), which literally means "melody" or "song of praise." A psalm is essentially a song sung in praise of God. Singing and praying go together.

The prayers of the Mass are also meant to be sung. We are all familiar with singing at Mass, but the prayers of the Mass themselves are designed to be sung as a way to lift our hearts and minds more to God. According to the documents of the Church, we are not merely meant to sing at Mass, but to sing the Mass. Christian liturgy grew out of Jewish Liturgy and our chant has its roots in the way Jews sang their liturgical texts. Chanting is a way of singing a text so that we can sing it together and have our hearts lifted more to God than if we spoke the text.

Simply put, to sing the Mass means to chant the given texts provided for each day of the liturgical year:

- the dialogues between the priest and people (the Lord be with you – and with your spirit),
- the collects (the opening prayer, the offertory prayer, the prayer after communion which collect our common prayers and present them to God),
- the proper antiphons which are given in the missal each day for the entrance and communion,
- the ordinary (the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Holy Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, the great Amen, the Lamb of God, and the Lord's Prayer).

The Mass is meant to sail, if you will, on the waters of this musical language which provides an environment of simple beauty, transcendence, and universality. We are meant to be carried by the melodies of chant so our hearts and minds can easily enter into God's presence. Certainly, chant can be complicated, but in many instances in the liturgy it can be quite simple using only a few notes allowing it to be made accessible to all (even those who think they cannot sing!) and providing a consistent thread through the whole liturgy, tying one prayer to the next. And it is in these simple, sacred melodies that have been carefully crafted and preserved throughout the life of the Church that the light of truth shines as it does through well-made stained-glass.

(OVER FOR MORE)

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed this when the Council Fathers stated in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy "The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services". In the 2007 document "Sing to the Lord" the US Bishops added, "Gregorian chant is uniquely the Church's own music. Chant is a living connection with our forebears in the faith, the traditional music of the Roman rite, a sign of communion with the universal Church, a bond of unity across cultures, a means for diverse communities to participate together in song, and a summons to contemplative participation in the Liturgy" (Sing to the Lord, #72).

To this end we are going to begin slowly to learn some simple chants for the Mass as a Diocese. We realize that different congregations have different capacities, and this may take some time for us to learn to do these simple chants well. However, these chants are not hard, and they are easily done without accompaniment. They can add dignity to every celebration once we learn them. They are contained in the Roman Missal itself, which means they are universal and wherever you go in the Church throughout the world you will experience these chant tones. In fact, your parish may already do this without your knowing.

We will begin to work on these in Lent of this year. We will start simply with the Lord Have Mercy, the Holy Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, the great Amen, the Lamb of God all in English. Some pastors are already doing other parts, like chanting the collects, the responses and the preface; we do this at the Cathedral for diocesan liturgies. We understand that parishes will have to proceed at their own pace.

My hope is to allow our worship to become a way to lift our hearts and minds to God and so I am grateful for your beginning to learn to sing the Mass so we can participate more fully and actively in the Worship God desires for us. If you are curious about what this will sound like during Mass, scan the code below for a playlist.

