



The Rediscovery of Musical Treasure

A workshop report, filed February 28, 2006

Gregorian chant has always been, and continues to be, the foundational song of Catholic liturgy. Through the centuries, however, it has not always taken pride of place in parish liturgy. Sometimes it has even seemed on the verge of extinction, only to be rediscovered by a new generation that is dedicated to bringing back to life its prayerful beauty, musical complexity, and spiritual aesthetic.

Many members of that new generation gathered in Auburn, Alabama, February 24-25, 2006, at St. Michael's Catholic Church, to learn and sing Gregorian chant, as part of an annual Sacred Music Workshop sponsored by the parish's own St. Cecilia Schola Cantorum.

The workshop began on Friday and culminated in a Saturday evening Vigil Mass where the Mass ordinary and propers were chanted according to the *Graduale Romanum*, the Church's official chant text for the Mass, and in accordance with directives put forth the GIRM. The liturgy was further enhanced by Renaissance choral music that had been inspired by chant.

It was the workshop's third year, and each year attendance has grown by one third. This year, nearly 100 singers came to study the chant with the goal of making it an integral part of Catholic worship in modern times.

The workshop was directed by Scott Turkington, a renowned parish musician in Stamford, Connecticut, and author of *The Gregorian Chant Masterclass*.

The musicians came from eight states and even Canada to receive instruction in reading chant notation, work on the style and approach of chant, discover the theological and liturgical case for chant, and also meet others who are working in this tradition. The ages ranged from 11 to 80, with men and women equally in attendance.

Most attendees were active parish musicians, including cathedral musicians, who were seeking the chant's solemnity and beauty as a means of enriching the liturgical life of their parishes. In some cases, whole choirs came to receive instruction, as sent by their pastors. In other cases, choir members on their own came to improve their skills.

Many of the musicians had never encountered chant before, while others had been singing it for years. During a question and answer period, they shared their experiences,

including trials and triumphs, in their individual efforts to master the style and approach and make it accessible and uplifting for modern ears.

Director Scott Turkington emphasized how different this music is from most any other. It requires a prayerful and humble disposition, and a willingness to let the music speak for itself. In demonstrating this, the workshop began with the simplest popular melodies such as "Adoro Te Devote" and "Tantum Ergo" that can be sung by anyone, and gradually moved to the more complex settings of chants of the liturgical calendar that require more expertise and practice.

Turkington noted that there are many thousands of chants that have been passed down to us for use in liturgy, so many that they cannot fit in a single volume. Their variety is as broad and varied as the liturgy itself, and they are suitable for every occasion. Their appeal tends to deepen over time, as does appreciation for their splendor and complexity.

The workshop used the chant book issued by Paul VI in 1974 called "Jubilate Deo" as the learning tool. It contains basic chants that the Pope had hoped would be used in every parish. John Paul II wrote often spoke the beauty of chant. And Benedict XVI has taken steps to see that Gregorian chant is taught in seminaries and heard in cathedrals and parishes.

Turkington also recommended that every parish musician own The Gregorian Missal, produced by the monks of the Solesmes Monastery in France. The book includes the main Gregorian Mass settings and all the chants that belong to each Sunday Mass and the main solemnities. It is this book that can have the biggest impact on parish musicians because it includes all readings in English as well as the Latin chants that belong to the Mass of the day.

The workshop was not limited to chant. It also explored the magnificence of polyphonic music from the Renaissance, which was inspired by chant and matches its style and liturgical aesthetic. Through the ages, the chants and polyphonic choirs had separate membership. But today's musical demands usually require that parish musicians develop the ability to sing both types of music.

The workshop began on Friday with the polyphonic tradition, and continued for a full day on chant instruction and singing on Saturday. All music was provided as part of registration, as were receptions and lunch on Saturday.

The participants left with a renewed sense of hope for the future of sacred music, new resources for putting it to use to the benefit of their parishes, new skills to make their music more beautiful, and new friends and colleagues to count on for support.

At the final liturgy, the workshop choir sang the Gregorian Mass setting "Missa Alma Pater" (Kyrie, Sanctus, Angus Dei), the Gloria from the Plainchant Mass, the offertory proper "Domine converte" and the communion proper "Cantabo domino," along with motets by Orlando di Lasso ("Jubilate Deo"), G.A. Palestrina ("Sicut Cervus"), and Felice

Anerio ("Christus Factus Est"). The celebrant was Fr. Todd Kreitinger, assistant pastor at St. Michael's, who thank the workshop choir for its extraordinary efforts on behalf of beautiful liturgy.

Next year's workshop takes place February 23-24, 2007. The Schola's website is www.Ceciliaschola.org. Write: Contact@ceciliaschola.org