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## PREFACE

It's getting easier after 150 years! -- 50 years of practicing, 50 years of playing in the church and 50 years of praying for help, guidance and creativity in all we do as a church musician. Through all these years we have earnestly tried to organize our efforts, build our energy and focus our thoughts so that with the morning hymn we might truly say,

*With the Lord begin your task.*

Now with this book of prayer, we have help with "that task" -- a task which every church musician faces and for which all of us need to prepare ourselves prayerfully and thoroughly as musicians and cantors of the church.

Appropriately, all the readings are from that great Cantor of the Church, David, and from the First Sunday in Advent to Christ the King Sunday we are regularly reminded of our personal needs and His daily promises of help. With that first cantor may we say

*Let us go to the House of the Lord and  
taste and see how good He is.*

These devotions for parish musicians will do much to make this possible. We commend this book to the office where you think, plan and dream, the choir and instrumental room where all the pieces are assembled and put in place, and the organ and choir loft where the fruition of all of our prayers and labors are realized.

Paul Manz

## INTRODUCTION

This book was inspired by separate and independent suggestions of two parish musicians for whom I have high regard - Carole Weatherby Clark and Paul Manz. To each of these fine artists I owe great gratitude, and it is my delight to dedicate this little book to both of them as a way of repaying them for the joy their music has given me.

The plan of this book is to offer two devotions for each week of the year. One of these devotions may be used for "practice time" - that time when parish musicians gather, or when organists, instrumentalists or choir directors work in solitude to prepare for their tasks of leading the people of God in public worship. The second devotion may be used for Sundays when the fruit of that practice time is offered as a stimulus for corporate prayer and praise to the God who gives us the gift of music. All of these devotions are based on the Psalms - "The Songbook of the Saints" - which have inspired some of the loftiest expressions of musicians in every century.

Each of these devotions may be used in personal devotions, or may be shared in groups as preparation for the work of rehearsing or performing.

Throughout the struggles and the delights of preparing music for worship, the reminder needs accent that what is offered comes from God as gift, and goes to God as an offering. That reminder is affirmed in these lines:

*Perhaps we should remember  
that it is of the essence  
of the meaning of life  
to sing songs  
to the Child of the manger  
and the Man on the cross...  
Perhaps we should also remember  
that we are never singing alone...  
that all of us as we go through time  
are only singing **the second voice...***

O. P. Kretzmann  
"Hosanna in the Whirlwind"  
Used by permission

Confidant of the truth and clarity of the second voice with us or among us, we make music to the glory of God.

## THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

*"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'"*

**Psalm 122:1**

There were no whistles and bells, no late night parties, but we have entered into a new year of grace. It is a time of great anticipation. Just as we look forward to the promise a new year brings us, we look forward in this season of Advent to the arrival of the One who makes all our years meaningful. We can look forward to this season and to this year with gladness because we have been called to serve in the house of the Lord. In that house of praise we are given the delightful duty to invite others to share in the excitement as we await the promised arrival of our salvation in the Child of the manger. As delightful as that task is, it is not without difficulty with all the clamor of celebration surrounding the coming holiday that is so freighted with sentimentalism. Therefore we must use every resource of wit and wisdom to get the attention of people who are so distracted in this season. Nonetheless, the challenge is before us, and we concentrate our energies on declaring the promise of the One who is to come, and invite others to share in the wonder of it all.

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*"Restore us, O God of hosts; show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved." Psalm 80:3*

There is a certain foolishness about us when we try to strike a bargain with God. I suspect we have all tried it at one time or another. We say to God that if he will give us what we long for, or rid us of what distresses us, then we will respond by being more faithful, or giving more than we have, or whatever else we might think is desirable to God. We know, of course, that God is not to be bargained with, but in our desperation we will try it anyway. The Advent season which is always pregnant with hope is a time for us to remember that we need not try such a silly strategy. Rather, it is a time to reflect on the steady purpose of God who is intent upon saving us. As we spend this season in anticipation, we wait for the brightness of God's countenance to shine upon us in the priceless gift of the One who comes to be our redeemer. He comes among us in the promised Child to show us in human terms just how much God cares for his people. We need not try to strike a bargain. We need only to trust in God's secure promise.

## THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

*"Will you not give us life again, that your people may rejoice in you?"*

*Psalm 85:6*

There is a lot of longing and hoping going on in this season of the year. Households where there are young children often find them studying the Christmas catalogs with more interest than was ever exhibited in textbooks. The wish-lists for Christmas presents grow longer with every new catalog that arrives in the home. Adults, too, are sometimes caught up in the wish-list game. As pleasant a preoccupation that may be, the Advent season urges us to be pleading for more than some additional clutter. What this season has to offer us is more profound than anything that can be found in a catalog or in a newspaper ad. Life is God's promise, new life in the promised Messiah. In these days we should be about the business of building an intensive sense of longing that will burst into delight when we celebrate the promise fulfilled in God's greatest gift. We can help our youngsters to grow in their anticipation of the greatness of Christmas by marking out the days between now and then with a special observance of the real meaning of this season of waiting.

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*"Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy." Psalm 126:6*

One of the things that contemporary people have in common with the people of the Old Testament is a sense of longing. There are detectable feelings of anxiety and incompleteness about people these days - a hope for something better in the years ahead. We surely find that among the people of old. Whether it was during the long slavery in Egypt, or the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, or the seventy years of exile in Babylon, there was a despair abroad among the people. Too many today are victims of a cruel fate, or victims of their own or someone else's wrongdoing. Their tears, poured out in pastors' or counselors' offices are evidence of their need for deliverance. But the remedy is on the way! God is at work in history. God is at work preparing to turn sorrow into joy, despair into hope, for over the horizon comes the promised Messiah - the One who was, and who is to come. In the coming of the Christ we can celebrate despite our anxieties, for God is at work on our behalf. Our hope is dawning!