

St. Paul and Sacred Music (20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Ephesians 5:15-20—Sing Psalms and Hymns

1. Moral Life: pay attention to “how you walk” (5:15; cf. Psa 1:1-2)
2. Drunkennes: “do not get drunk with wine” (5:18)
3. Spirit: “be filled with the Spirit” (5:18)
4. Sacred Music: Paul enjoins the Ephesians to sing sacred songs (5:18)
 - a. Psalms: “psalms” (Gk *psalmos*), a “song of praise” (cf. Psalms, *Tehillim*)
 - b. Hymns: “hymns” (Gk *hymnos*), sung in praise of a deity
 - c. Songs: “spiritual songs” (Gk *ōdai pneumatikai*)
5. Thanksgiving: “giving thanks” in the name of Jesus (5:20)

The Living Tradition

Vatican II: *The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. Sacred scripture, indeed, has bestowed praise upon sacred song [cf. Eph 5:19; Col 3:16] (Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 112)*

Vatican II: *Jesus Christ, High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He attaches to himself the entire community of mankind and has them join him in singing his divine song of praise. For he continues his priestly work through his Church. The Church, by celebrating the Eucharist and by other means, especially the celebration of the divine office, is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the entire world. The divine office, in keeping with ancient Christian tradition, is so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God. Therefore, when this wonderful song of praise is correctly celebrated by priests and others deputed to it by the Church, or by the faithful praying together with a priest in the approved form, then it is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom. It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father. (Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 83)*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What role does the singing of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs play in your own spiritual life? What role do they play in your experience of the liturgy?

For Further Reading

1. James McKinnon. *Music in Early Christian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.