

**Guidelines for Liturgical Services
according to the
1962 *Missale Romanum***

Music for Low Mass

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“At low Mass the faithful who participate directly in the liturgical ceremonies with the celebrant by reciting aloud the parts of the Mass which belong to them must, along with the priest and his server, use Latin exclusively. But if, in addition to this direct participation in the liturgy, the faithful wish to add some prayers or popular hymns, according to local custom, these may be recited or sung in the vernacular.” (De musica sacra et sacra liturgia, 14, b.)

Question:

Does the celebration of a Low Mass require the singing of a choir?

Answer:

Whereas, at a High Mass, the music of the *schola cantorum* is integral to the liturgical action, the music of the Low Mass is in no way integral to the celebration of its liturgy. Low Masses, of course, may be offered without any music whatsoever.

Question:

Is it permissible for the Low Mass to be celebrated with sacred music?

Answer:

Yes. Low Mass may be celebrated with appropriate sacred music according to the liturgical norms. Whereas the High Mass requires the complete chanting of the liturgical Propers and the Ordinary, the Low Mass is ornamented by sacred music such as sacred hymns and antiphons or with organ music.

Question:

Is there any music, which is not allowed at the Low Mass?

Answer:

It is not permitted to sing any of the prayers or responses (*i.e.* “*Et cum spiritu tuo,*” “*Amen,*” *etc.*), nor any of the Proper (*i.e.* “*Introit,*” “*Gradual,*” *etc.*), nor any of the Ordinary (*i.e.* “*Kyrie,*” “*Gloria,*” *etc.*), whether in Latin or in the vernacular.

Question:

Does the priest sing anything at the Low Mass?

Answer:

No. The rubrics of the Low Mass do not permit the priest to chant.

Question:

What music may be sung by the choir and congregation at a Low Mass?

Answer:

The choir and/or congregation may sing appropriate liturgical hymns, motets, and antiphons and the organ may be played.

Question:

At a High Mass the choir and/or congregation always sing the Propers and Ordinary in Latin. But at a Low Mass, since the Propers and Ordinary are never sung, is it permissible to sing hymns, motets, antiphons, or other liturgical music in other languages?

Answer:

The Church permits that the music of the Low Mass may be rendered in either Latin or in the vernacular.

Question:

When may the choir and congregation sing at a Low Mass?

Answer:

They may sing whenever the priest is not praying in a loud voice. But music may not be sung at the Elevation of the Sacred Host or at the Elevation of the Chalice.

Question:

Is it spiritually beneficial to sing at Low Mass?

Answer:

The Church commends the practice of singing at Low Mass as devotional exercises for the spiritual edification of the faithful.

Question:

What is a suggested musical plan for the Low Mass?

Answer:

It is well to prepare the following:

Processional Hymn, Motet or Organ Music
Offertory Hymn, Motet or Organ Music
Communion Hymn, Motet or Organ Music
Recessional Hymn, Motet or Organ Music

Question:

Is it preferable to render the music of Low Mass in Latin rather than in the vernacular?

Answer:

Because of the inestimable wealth of our Latin musical heritage, it is preferable to chant Latin hymns during a Low Mass, and this, moreover, can be a means to gradually introduce a repertoire of sacred Latin liturgical music in a parish. Nonetheless, the Church permits the singing of suitable vernacular hymns at the Low Mass, hymns that are not only appropriate to the liturgical season, but which also are consonant with the spirit of Gregorian chant, which the ancient Roman Rite so highly lauds.

Question:

In what document does the Church enumerate the rules for the application of music at the Low Mass?

Answer:

The Congregation of Rites, on September 3, 1958, quoted at length in *Matters Liturgical* (pp. 47, 48 of the 1959 edition), states:

First of all, such popular religious hymns are greatly to be commended and esteemed, since they constitute a most effective means in directing the minds of the faithful to heavenly things and in imbuing the Christian life with a genuine religious spirit.

Strongly to be encouraged for pious exercises, they can only be sung at liturgical functions "when this is expressly permitted."

English hymns are expressly permitted during a Low Mass, but in general expressly forbidden during a High Mass:

Hymns in the vernacular are permitted at a Low Mass, on condition that their theme corresponds to the part of the Mass at which they are sung.

This means that a theme of sacrifice or offering is retained at the Offertory, of thanksgiving, love of God or any similar theme at Communion time. However, the singing of vernacular hymns at a

sung Mass or Missa Cantata is manifestly an abuse that can only be tolerated when backed up by a long standing custom that has lasted for over a century:

They [hymns in the vernacular] are permitted at a Mass in chant only in the case of a centenary or immemorial custom, which in the judgment of the local Ordinary cannot prudently be suppressed....

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