

## The Propers for the Feast of All Saint: a Commentary

The Church has assigned some outstanding chants for the Mass on the Feast of All Saints. These certainly deserve to be studied and we will do so here, paying particular attention to the musical exegesis that the texts receive. We cannot in any way be exhaustive so our aim is only to give the reader enough of a background to achieve a more nuanced performance of these chants. Any suggestions given for performance are general, but the nuances discussed can be a guide to a more precise rendering. In what follows, the reader should consult the current Roman Gradual. These propers are the same for both forms of the Roman Rite.

This feast was a late addition to the Church calendar, becoming widely celebrated only as late as the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the propers for this feast have been borrowed from commemorations or feasts of Martyrs. Only the Alleluia and Communion antiphon seem to have been composed specifically for this feast. All of the chants except for the Alleluia are in mode 1, a mode whose seriousness helps us to meditate piously on the magnificent ideas contained in the texts.<sup>1</sup> The Alleluia was composed in mode 8, a very solemn mode, and therefore the perfect one to highlight the sacredness of the text in accordance with the event being celebrated.

### The Introit

*Gaudeamus omnes in Domino, diem festum celebrantes sub honore Sanctorum omnium: de quorum solemnitate gaudent Angeli, et collaudant Filium Dei. Ps. (32:1) Exultate justi in Domino: rectos decet collaudatio.*

[Let us all rejoice in the Lord, celebrating a festival day in honour of all the Saints: at whose solemnity the Angels rejoice and give praise to the Son of God. Ps. Rejoice in the Lord, ye just: praise becometh the upright.]

This introit originates from the feast of St. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr. It is also assigned to other feasts of Saints, and certain feasts of Our Lady. The text is from liturgical poetry and is likely of Greek origin.<sup>2</sup> Only a few words are changed to make the text conform to the particular feast being celebrated. In this introit it is the Church that invites us to rejoice along with the Angels. There is plenty of energy in the melody that firmly maintains an air of joy throughout. It begins with a classic intonation for mode 1, which immediately lifts our hearts to a height that can partake in the joy found in the heavenly realm. The extended ornamentation of the tenor (LA) on the word *Domino* (Lord) is particularly joyful, and is surely meant to express a thanks to our Lord for this gift of joy to the Saints in heaven.

The melody over *Angeli* (Angels) is both very joyful and yet solemn, illustrating the magnificence of the heavenly realm where both the Saints and the Angels en-joy the Beatific Vision. On the first syllable we have the Kaire motive, FA-SOL-LA-SOL-LA taken from the first few notes of the offertory *Ave Maria* for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent.<sup>3</sup> In the latter the Angel Gabriel joyfully greets Mary with *Ave* (Hail), or in the Greek text, Kaire, which really means “Rejoice”. This motive, or musical formula, is an expression of angelic joy on a solemn occasion such as when Mary was asked to be the Mother of God. Here, the Angels solemnly rejoice at the Beatific Vision of all the Saints and Martyrs.

References to the Angels are also found in several of today's propers, because these reside in the heavenly realm the place where all the Saints dwell. Even the entire Epistle of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Mass is devoted to St. John's awesome vision of the Angels adoring God in the heavenly realm.

This introit could be sung with a joyful energy, paying attention to the added solemnity and joy of *Angeli*.

## The Gradual

*Timete Dominum, omnes sancti ejus: quoniam nihil deest timentibus eum. Vs. Inquirentes autem Dominum non deficient omni bono. (Ps. 33:10, Vs. 11b)*

[Fear the Lord, all ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. Vs. But they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good.]

This gradual is a suitable meditation on the awesome nature of heaven as just described by St. John in the Epistle for the Extraordinary Form of the Mass. The fear of the Lord is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. We should not look at this fear in a sense of dread in the face of some physical pain, torment, or punishment that will befall us; rather, Christians become afraid to offend the Lord precisely because of their love for Him. The fear of the Lord is in regards to our moral and so spiritual well being, not bodily. This has been difficult to convey and much has been written on the subject. Remarkably, the music in this gradual helps us understand this filial fear.

It is the Martyrs in heaven who are speaking to us in this gradual. The heavenly realm awaits all those on earth that fear the Lord, as the Holy Martyrs testify to us today.

The gradual begins with a melody that sounds very serious, only going to the FA as the note of recitation. The ornamented recitation on FA gives the modality a stability that puts a firmness to the exhortation. The extended ornamentation on the last syllable of *Dominum* (Lord) gives us a brief pause to meditate on the exhortation to fear the Lord before proceeding to the next part of the text. The intermediate cadence on DO makes us anticipate what is to follow.

What follows is a melody that rises on *omnes* (all): FA-SOL-LA-SI-LA; this is the motive of lasting melos.<sup>4</sup> It is the musical formula used to suggest a gain after a great loss, as in the Requiem Kyrie where after death we hope for life eternal with God, and the intonation for the offertory *Super flumina Babylonis* where we meditate that, from its ashes, Jerusalem and its Temple will be rebuilt. This motive is telling us here that the loss of life that everyone must eventually succumb to on this earth can be a gain of eternal life in heaven; indeed, the melody then leaps to the high DO on *sancti* (ye Saints) a height from where we can hear the Saints and Martyrs giving us a testimony of their joy even while addressing those of us here on earth.

On *ejus* (his) there is a similar cadential formula as that found previously on *Dominum*, and this too prepares us to listen to the next part of the text, in this case an explanation for the exhortation.

In this explanation we not only again have the motive of lasting melos on *quoniam* (for or because), but immediately after we are also confronted with the melody on *nihil* (no) which is reminiscent of the melody on the same word *nihil* in the introit for Gaudete Sunday. Theological associations are being made here. In the latter, St. Paul is about to be martyred yet he exhorts if not even chastises everyone NOT to worry over his impending death, for the Lord is coming soon. There should be no worry at all, for one must put all one's trust and faith in God. As the offertory text says, nothing is lacking for those who fear the Lord. St. Paul understands that we must not fear the death of the body for this can be the occasion for gaining a place in heaven for the soul. Hence, we need to fear offending God and not what can happen to the body. The melody here in the gradual through its association with other contexts simply reminds us that the death of the body may be a great loss indeed, but there is a much greater glory awaiting the soul for those who fear God.

In the verse, there is a long melisma on *Inquirentes* (they that seek) which tells the story of the many saints seeking the heavenly realm. The melody wanders up and down, and we may note that in

the wandering there is the paschal motive, FA-MI- SOL-LA a melodic formula found in certain key places throughout the Gregorian repertoire, such as in the last part of the Litany of Saints to express the death and glorious resurrection of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Here we are being warned that we may also need to sacrifice our lives to reach the heavenly realm of LA, the way the Holy Martyrs did following Christ. FA-MI indicates the humiliation through death of our Lord on the cross, SOL is the note of the resurrection, and LA is the gateway to the heavenly realm opened through the death and resurrection of Christ. The seeking finally ends on LA, the heavenly realm that Christ entered after his resurrection. The long melisma on *autem* (but) is a rhetorical device, stressing the contrast between the previous text, that of seeking, and the text that is about to follow, that of finding in God nothing else to seek for anymore; we will see this device used again later in the offertory.

As it is the Martyrs singing, the exhortation may be sung with firmness and seriousness, reflecting the awesome nature of the heavenly realm that was just described in the ancient Epistle; the rest can be sung more joyfully but still with a serious attitude. Keep in mind St Paul's chastisement of the faithful on *nihil* and the glorious meaning of FA-MI-SOL-LA. The *autem* should be sung with great energy.

## The Alleluia

*Alleluia, alleluia. Vs. Venite ad me, omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos. Alleluia.*  
(Mt.11:28)

[Alleluia, Alleluia. Vs. Come unto me, all you that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give rest to you. Alleluia.]

The melody for this Alleluia is very pleasant and solemn, a jewel in the musical treasure of the Roman Gradual. It is not a type melody but is probably written especially for this feast. Like most Gospel Alleluias for the Mass, the jubilus on the final syllable of Alleluia, which in Hebrew is actually the tetragrammaton, is a praise to the Trinity. This jubilus expresses what cannot be said in words, the ineffable, God as a Trinity, by using melody without words. Like the Hebrews, we sing the Alleluia in praise of God. But God has revealed to us that He is three persons, so on the tetragrammaton we extend our praise with three distinct melodies one devoted to each person of the Blessed Trinity. First we sing praise to the Father by doubling a short melody ending with the cadence on FA. Then we sing another short and distinct melody without doubling in praise of the Son, with cadence on LA. The remainder of the jubilus is quite long with a doubling of another distinct but longer melody which we sing in praise of the Holy Spirit. We should make a slight pause after each praise before continuing to the next one. According to tradition the melody of the jubilus is repeated on the last syllable of the last word of the verse.

What stands out in the verse is the very long melisma on the word *laboratis* (labour). Clearly a great emphasis is being placed on this word. It incorporates some of the motives of the jubilus, only to have the melody go even higher with them. These notes are quite high even for a mode 8 composition, going through several hexachords. The composer would seem to want us to labor hard to reach those very high FAs. We can rest from this hard work once we get to the end of the word *onerati* (heavy laden). The *ego reficiam* (I will give rest) is finally easier to sing, and has a nice restful character to it, so it could be sung a bit softer and slower as a contrast to the preceding.

## The Offertory

*Justorum animae in manu Dei sunt: et non tanget illos tormentum malitiae: visi sunt oculis insipientium mori, illi autem sunt in pace. Alleluia.* (Wis. 3:1, 2, 3)

[The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of malice shall not touch them: in the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, but they are in peace. Alleluia]

Although offertory melodies are usually original compositions on the text, the melody for this text was adapted from the offertory *Stetit Angelus* for Michaelmas probably around the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The adaptation originates from the Mass for Martyrs. In the context of our feast, this chant is a meditation on the Beatific Vision of the Saints, with emphasis on all the Martyrs who suffered and died for Christ, and there have been so many in the history of the Church. The melody actually occurs in several offertory chants, such as *Viri Galilaei* originally for the vigil of the Ascension which is now no longer celebrated, *Tu es Petrus*, and the intonation for the introit *Omnes gentes*.

Be this as it may, this offertory chant is a masterpiece. The adaptation of the original melody to this new text is an impressive work of art, the melody being even more beautifully integrated into this text than to the original one. The original melody has been modified in places to foster a mature meditation on the deserved gift of peace of the Holy Martyrs following their torment and pain on this earth. As with the equally remarkable adaptation of the melody of the *Christus Factus est* from *Ecce Sacerdos magnus* (Behold the great Priest), an association is being made between the original text and the new one through the use of the same melody. In *Christus Factus est*, the original gradual for Maundy Thursday, the music recalls to us the sacrificial nature of the Last Supper where Christ is both the high priest and victim. In *Justorum animae* we are associating the angelic witness to God with the peace of the Martyrs in heaven. The Angels led the Holy Martyrs upon their death to heavenly paradise and now they stand with the Angels before God enjoying the Beatific Vision, a state of perfect peace where no pain or torment will ever touch them again.

The music divides the text into three parts. The first begins with *animae* (souls) and is highly ornamented with neumes which gives us more time to meditate on the scriptural theme that is being introduced, viz., that the souls of the righteous are under God's protection. The second part begins with *visi sunt* (seemed to) and without going beyond the range of a fourth it is a simple melody revolving around the tonic, making a fairly a plain statement of the mistaken views of the unwise. In the third part beginning with *illi* (they) we have a very different moment in the chant. All of a sudden we hear a long 43 note melisma explode on the word *autem* (but or moreover); it pushes aside the depressing thoughts of the unwise through a melodic contrast. Notice how high it goes all of a sudden in contrast to the melody of the unwise, trying to hang on to the high DO, and in the process leading our thoughts directly towards the heavenly realm and the indescribable joy of the Saints who dwell there. Originally written to describe the ascending smoke from the thurible as the Angels adore God in *Stetit Angelus*, here it used as a rhetorical device expressed through music. When speaking of two contrasting ideas, the conjunction used to contrast them is often emphasised to make a point. We see this also on the *autem* of the introit *Nos autem*. We also find this rhetorical device in a much smaller measure on the *et* (and) in this offertory. Even in ordinary speech one can make an indelicate remark, and then emphasise the conjunction that leads to a better remark as in "You may be old, BUT, you are still beautiful." *Autem* should then be sung with great contrasting energy.

The melody for *sunt in pace* (are in peace) has been modified from the original to better express a peaceful cadence in conformity to the meaning of the text.

Finally, the whole Church, along with the Angels and Saints in heaven, resound in a spectacular alleluia. The alleluia was added to the scriptural text precisely to thank God through praise for this wonderful gift of peace. This melody has three parts, the first ending with and intermediate cadence on

DO, and the second with the cadence on MI, no doubt to address individually each person of the Trinity. It is composed of various fragments from the offertory melody woven together with some added ornamentation into a glorious acclamation of praise, and yet still keeping within the serious ethos of mode 1. It may be a good idea to have the whole choir sing this alleluia, as if we can now hear on earth the Angels and the Saints joining us in this singing of praise.

Like most offertories that appear in current chant books, this one has been shortened, allowing more time for polyphony during the offertory.<sup>6</sup> There are, in other words, more remarkable features in this offertory chant that are no longer found in the current books.

## The Communion

*Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt : beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur: beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.* (Mt. 5:8, 9, 10)

[Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God: blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God: blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.]

The text for this communion antiphon is taken from the Gospel, and is a meditation on the last three beatitudes as the faithful receive the Blessed Sacrament which nourishes them to anticipate these blessings. The beatitudes speak of the blessings that men of good will will receive as a reward either on this earth or in the next world for following the example of Christ. The blessings in these last three beatitudes would obtain more in the next world. In the first, those on earth who without any pretensions, that is, in purity of heart, fix their gaze on the Father who is heaven will be given the blessing of actually seeing God in the life to come, the Beatific Vision. Correspondingly, the intonation stays fixed exclusively on the ornamented tenor LA, a fairly high intonation for mode 1. The antiphon seems to begin from a fixed gaze towards the heavenly realm. In the second, the peacemakers on earth will be blessed with the true peace of heaven as the offertory text tells us, and the melody over *Die* (God) leaps to the high DO to remind us of the heavenly realm of God where His children have found true peace.

The third beatitude is singled out for special emphasis. It speaks of those who are persecuted for the sake of Justice. But Jesus is the Sun of Justice (Mal. 3:20) whom the clouds have rained down to earth (Is 45:8). So the blessed referred to here are those who are being persecuted for the sake of Christ. On *beati* (blessed) in this last beatitude, the notes soar way above any other notes in the entire chant, resounding in an ecstasy of joy not seen anywhere in this antiphon. For the composer this is an important beatitude in relation to today's feast. There is great joy in heaven for those who have been persecuted on earth for Christ's sake because a great blessing awaits them. Then, all of a sudden, the melody takes on a different rhythm by becoming syllabic on the word *persecutionem* (persecution) on a melody reminiscent of the solemn Passion Gospel melodies for Holy Week, and indeed, a rhythm that perhaps emulates the scourges that Jesus repeatedly underwent in His suffering on Good Friday.<sup>7</sup> This melody is leading us to meditate again on martyrdom with the serious suggestion that those who follow Christ may be asked to do so with their lives. And finally, we have the climax of the musical exegesis of the text on this last beatitude, the FA-MI-SOL-LA that we spoke of earlier, now over the word *regnum* (kingdom). But in this paschal motive we also have incorporated as an extension the Kaire motive of angelic joy we spoke of earlier, SOL-LA-SOL-LA repeated again and again to rejoice for the heavenly kingdom that has been opened by Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection as a gift to those who likewise follow Him on this earth through persecution and even to the ultimate sacrifice of

martyrdom. This kingdom of God is where All the Saints now live in joy and peace. These subtleties should be clearly expressed in the singing of this antiphon.

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- 1 The late Canon Jean Jeanneteau did some extensive research on the ethos of the octoechos, which we are only superficially considering here. These have been summarised by Dom Daniel Saulnier OSB in his *The Gregorian Modes*, Solesmes, 2002.
- 2 M. Clement Morin, pss and Robert M. Fowells, “Gregorian Musical Words”, in *Choral essays: A Tribute to Roger Wagner*, edited by William Wells Belan , San Carlos (CA): Thomas House Publications, 1993, page 119.
- 3 For a discussion of this and other such motives, see Morin and Fowells, *op. cit.*
- 4 *ibid.*, page 120.
- 5 For a further discussion on this, see M. Clement Morin pss. and Robert M. Fowells, “The Gregorian Language: Servus Dei”, in *Cum Angelis Canere*, edited by Robert A. Skeris, Saint Paul (MN): Catholic Church Music Association, 1990, pages 85-88.
- 6 Dom Daniel Saulnier, however, thinks that the shortening of the offertories was due to the discontinuance of the offertory procession that these chants used to accompany. See his *Gregorian Chant: A Guide to the History and Liturgy*, Brewster (MA): Paraclete Press, 2009, pages 73 and 75.
- 7 The sound of the strikes of a scourging at this point in the melody is, at least, what Johner suggests. See Dom Dominic Johner OSB, *The Chants of the Vatican Gradual*, New York and Cincinnati: Fr. Pustet & Co., 1925, page 471.