**Sacred Music**

The Second Vatican Council, in the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), devoted an entire chapter to the discussion of sacred music in the liturgy. This week, we will reflect on a few passages from this document.

**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 sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy** (SC 112 § 1).

Notice the unique pre-eminence given to music by the council: it is greater than any other art, specifically because of its role in the liturgy. Following the council in this regard, it is important that we never think of music as trivial or as an “add-on.”

**[S]acred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites** (SC 112 § 3).

Here we see some of the beautiful contributions of sacred music. First, it adds “delight to prayer.” We all know the power of a beautiful hymn or chant drawing us up into deeper and more profound prayer to God. Also, sacred music “fosters unity of minds”: even more than words spoken together, music brings our voices and minds into a powerful unity, drawing us into the very mind of Christ as we worship Him with one voice. Further, it “confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites”: sacred music is not like the music we hear on the radio or at a concert, but is unique to the liturgy. As a result, when we hear it, we are led to recognize the sacredness, dignity, and seriousness of what takes place at the liturgy.

**The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted, especially in cathedral churches; but bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that, whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs…**(SC 114).

Note the desire of the council that great care and diligence attend the “treasure of sacred music.” First, it is to be “preserved”: the great tradition of sacred music must not be forgotten or ignored. Secondly, it must be “fostered with great care”: we must actively work to make sure this treasure is preserved and handed on. How will this happen? In two ways in particular: the promotion of choirs and the training of “the whole body of the faithful” in sacred music.

**Great importance is to be attached to the teaching and practice of music in seminaries, in the novitiates and houses of study of religious of both sexes, and also in other Catholic institutions and schools. To impart this instruction, teachers are to be carefully trained and put in charge of the teaching of sacred music.**

**It is desirable also to found higher institutes of sacred music whenever this can be done.**

**Composers and singers, especially boys, must also be given a genuine liturgical training** (SC 115).

The promotion of sacred music requires deliberate training and teaching. Those in religious life (or preparing for it) are to be trained in sacred music. Other Catholic institutions and schools are to devote themselves to this instruction as well.