

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 42. October 13, 2019. Proper 23

Notes on the Liturgy 5. Music and Silence

"I will sing praises to my God while I have my being!" (Ps. 146 v.1)

"But I still my soul and make it quiet, like a child upon its mother's breast: my soul is quieted within me." (Ps 131 v. 3)

For some reason, since the dawn of history, we humans have expressed our deepest emotions –love, awe and wonder, sorrow and joy, loneliness and belonging – in song or in song's sister, silence. No wonder then, that music and silence are among the most important elements of any liturgy. Every strand of Christianity has its own musical tradition (except perhaps the Quakers), from Baptist hymns, to Coptic chants, and most have a place for silence (especially perhaps the Quakers). Participation in congregational singing and in communal silence offers the laity one of the most direct means of participation in the liturgy.

Music in the context of the Eucharist must always be participatory, it cannot be allowed to become 'entertainment.' The hymns and chants we sing together, even the anthems, psalms and canticles sung by the choir alone, are prayers offered to God, not performances for some 'audience' – which is why do not applaud the choir for a well-sung anthem; at most, we whisper 'amen.' Silence must also participatory. It provides us a chance to reflect individually but as part of the gathered people of God on what has been read or sung, or done. So used, silence can be a profound source of unity.

In our Anglican tradition, the communal singing of hymns, the choir's anthems, the chanted dialog and prayer, the organ interludes, are all powerful reminders that when we gather to worship, we are entering another realm, another reality, one radically different from our day to day life, a reality in which beauty is a central value.

We are lucky at Holy Trinity to have a strong music ministry. Let us make sure we support it with our voices and our prayerful attention. As for silence, we're not there yet, but we're working on it.

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