

## WHAT GOOD MAY COME FROM THE PLENARY COUNCIL

By Jim Jones

Anyone who's been an active Catholic for 80 years, as I have, may well have heard at different stages of life, 5 or 6 bishops extolling the achievement of the Council of Jerusalem but has likely never heard any bishop quote St. Luke's key words "after much disputing". Success at the Council of Jerusalem was achieved only "after much disputing" to quote chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles. Success at the Second Vatican Council was achieved only after much disputing and nothing worthwhile will emerge from the Plenary Council without "much disputing". If we want results we'll have to fight for them, as bishops had to fight for necessary reforms at the Vatican Council.

The Plenary Council will be worthwhile if it can produce real reform of the liturgy, if we can get the reforms made by the Vatican Council put into practice. Two major changes are required; music must be enlivened and the readings must be clearly heard and meaningful.

We are taught to suspect that serious musicians are preoccupied with their own development to the exclusion of other motives for working. Exuberance is anathema, for what have we to be happy about? The second person of the blessed trinity has become one of us, lived for us, died for us, rose from the dead, promised that we also will rise from the dead and promised to care for us in the meantime. What have we to be happy about?

The reality is that serious musicians are no more prone to narcissism than any other group in the community. Most of them understand that they will not develop as musicians unless they concentrate on serving their listeners. The parable of the talents points out to us that talents are to be developed; burying talents is a sure path to unhappiness. But when we hear a good singer are we not inclined to say: "that's quite a talent. How about you bury it in the church choir".

When we attended Mass in the form of the Tridentine rite we heard the readings in a language we did not understand. Never mind, we listened with respect. The changes made nearly sixty years ago mean that we hear the readings in our own language. But we don't mind if the reader mumbles and we cannot understand the readings. We don't mind if the reader does not comprehend and convey to us the meaning and importance of the readings. We don't mind if the reader's lips are in the wrong place relative to the microphone. We listen with respect. Or rather 8 or 10 percent of us listen with respect and the rest stop coming to Mass. We've put new wine into old wineskins, with catastrophic consequences.

We have accepted the disadvantages of a vernacular liturgy without the advantages. Perhaps each parish should have a meeting on Wednesday or Thursday evening and prepare the weekend's liturgies. Participants should be all the weekend celebrants, all the readers and all the music leaders. There might be discussion about the meaning and significance of the readings. The music leaders should detail what they have prepared which should be 12 or 15 minutes of music, of which at least one third and no more than two thirds, should be for the congregation to sing. If advice comes from a theatre group professional or amateur, it may be worth listening to.

And each parish should have a team of special readers, perhaps to be called lectors and perhaps to be ordained as such, who undertake to be prepared to read whenever they come to weekend Mass - just in case the rostered readers don't turn up, even if they attended the preparatory meeting. Perhaps the number of "lectors" should be about three per hundred of expected congregants so unprepared readings will never be heard by the congregation. Over a few years a lector would build up an enhanced knowledge of the bible.

And the music. “Composers, filled with the Christian spirit, should feel that their vocation is to cultivate sacred music and increase its store of treasures.” So we were instructed by the Second Vatican Council, in Sacrosanctum Concilium. There is no hope for the liturgy unless there is a steady stream of new music available to parish choirs and if there is no hope for the liturgy there is no hope for the Church. And choirs should occasionally, once or twice a month, sing some of the great classic pieces of church music. Cesar Frank’s Panis Angelicus, Mozart’s Ave verum, Alleluia from Exsultate jubilate, Laudate Dominum from Vespers, Beethoven’s Creation’s Hymn, William Walton’s Canticle of the Sun, He shall feed his flock by Handel, Jesu joy of man’s desiring, O esca viatorum and the list can go on.

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