

"How, When And What To Play"

A Guide For Catholic Organists.

By Giuseppe Villani, S.C.,
San Francisco, California

INTRODUCTION

A musician called to offer the fruits of his talents to the service of God, either as a composer, as a choirmaster, or as an organist, in a Catholic Church should conform to the regulations established by the Catholic Church. Such rules, prescriptions, or regulations, are definite and precise.

In the old Law (Deut. XXVIII, 15) is the command of God saying: ". . . if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord, thy God, to keep and to do all His commandments and ceremonies, which I command thee this day, all these curses shall come upon thee. Cursed shalt thou be in the city, cursed in the field. Cursed shall be thy barn, and cursed thy stores, etc."

And down, in more recent ages, we find Pius V, who orders us: ". . . decantetur aut recitetur Missa juxta ritum, modum et normam quae per Missale traditur" ("The Mass shall be sung or said according to the rite, the way and the rule laid down in the Missal").

There are many other regulations, or ecclesiastical orders, to prove that no one has any right to presume the possibility of disregarding, with impunity, any regulation of which Our Mother the Church is a very jealous custodian. As soon as we know and feel truly convinced that the Church is the House of God, and we go there ONLY to pray and to worship our Creator and our Redeemer, we easily come to the natural conclusion that everything should be in accordance with the first aim and intention.

In the Introduction to the Motu Proprio, we read: "Nothing therefore ought to occur in the Temple, which disturbs, or even merely diminishes, the piety and devotion of the Faithful. . . and, above all, nothing which offends against the decorum and sanctity of the sacred offices, and which appears unworthy of the House of prayer and the Majesty of God."

Consequently all the ceremonies and the singing and playing is to be done in the way that the Church prescribes, abhorring everything that would be even a smallest profanation of that very House of God.

The Duties of The Organist At A Low Mass

In almost all the Catholic Churches in this Country, the organist is also the Choirmaster (or director of the Choir); therefore what is said here of the one, is understood also for the other. A person who occupies a place of responsibility in society must know the duties of his state.

A priest, a doctor, a lawyer, a justice or any magistrate etc. has to know the duties of his particular position. "Whoever asserts that the accepted and approved Rites of the Catholic Church can be **ignored** or omitted at pleasure, or changed by any Pastor of the Church, let him be an anathema." (Council of Trent, 7th S. Can. 13). Consequently, as the Catholic organist occupies a very important place in the service of the House of God, he has a duty to **learn** and to **know** and to **practice** what concerns him, according to his position. He must learn "how to appreciate and love our holy Liturgy". The organist, besides knowing **HOW** to play well his instrument, must also know especially **WHEN** to play it; and here the writer will try to help him, by consulting together the three most important official Sources of the Latin Liturgy, namely the Coeremoniale Episcoporum (Ceremonial of the Bishops), the Council of Trent, and the **precious Motu proprio** of Pius X. It would be well that every Catholic organist and choirmaster should have and peruse the above mentioned Motu proprio, to which that holy Pope commanded that "the force of Law be given", and to the same He imposed a "scrupulous observance on all". And now, let us see at last when the organ may be played at a low Mass.

We may say that in general, it is allowed, or optional, to play the organ at every **extraliturgical** service, an organist may start to play a few minutes before the Celebrant goes

*This can be done "in omnibus Dominicis et omnibus festis per annum occurrentibus, in quibus populi a servilibus operibus abstinere solent. Inter eas non connumeratur Dominicae Adventus et Quadragesimae, excepta Dominica tertia Adventus quae dicitur **Gaudete in Domino**, et quarta Quadragesimae, quae dicitur **Laetare, Jerusalem**, et nisi celebratur pro Defunctis" (Caerem. Episc. XXVIII, 1-2).

to the altar for a low Mass*; on all Sundays and Festivals on which the people abstain from servile work; except the Sundays of Advent and Lent; among these are not included the Sundays of Advent and Lent, except the Sunday **Gaudette** and **Lae-tare**, i.e. the 3rd Sunday of Advent, and the 4th of Lent". We may add that the organ, without singing, may play on the Feasts and Ferias in Advent and Lent, which are celebrated solemnly by the Church: it is also understood that the organ (without singing) is not allowed in the Masses of the Dead. We said it is optional to play the organ during all the time of a low Mass, loud or soft; in fact, if the Ceremonial of the Bishops says that "ad elevationem Sanctissimi Sacramenti pulsatur organum **graviori et dulciori sono**, during the elevation the organ plays in a grave and sweet way" (XXVIII, 9), it is clear enough that it can play also during the rest of the time of the Mass; but an organist who understands (as he ought to) the various parts of Holy Mass, knows **HOW** and **WHEN** to play loud, or soft, or moderately; and, to give an idea, he can play a little louder before the Mass, during the reading of the Gospel, and after the Mass, continuing (if he likes) until a few minutes after the Celebrant has gone to the Sacristy. But let me end this Chapter with the quotation of some good words of Fr. J. Kelly: "As people attend Mass to praise God in supreme act of worship, the position of the organist being a sacred one he should contribute to this praise by such music as will assist the people in their devotions; the possession of technical ability does not imply the possession of skill in playing a Catholic liturgical service." And much more forcible are these words of the Caerem. Ep.: "Cavendum est ne sonus organi sit lascivus aut impurus" (XXVIII, 11), ("Endeavor that the playing of the organ be not lascivious or obscene".) Consequently not all the piano or concert-music is good for the organ, in Church services.

As far as here, the above rules concern only low Mass, when there is no singing at all. Now let us see what the organist (or choirmaster) has to know and to do at the low Mass, when there is singing.

(To be continued.)

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