

1961 Solesmes “Liber Usualis” :

PREFACE TO THE VATICAN EDITION

OF THE ROMAN CHANT.

The place of honour in this Solesmes Edition of the Vatican Official text is given to the Vatican Preface. Its wise counsels and general Principles of interpretation are embodied, elucidated and enlarged upon in the Rules given further on.

Holy Mother the Church has received from God the charge of training the souls of the faithful in all holiness, and for this noble end has ever made a happy use of the help of the sacred Liturgy. Wherein — in order that men’s minds may not be sundered by differences, but that, on the contrary, the unity which gives vigour and beauty to the mystical body of Christ might flourish unimpaired — she has been zealous to keep the traditions of our forefathers, ever trying diligently to discover and boldly to restore any which might have been forgotten in the course of the ages.

Now among those things which most nearly touch the sacred Liturgy, being as it were interwoven therein and giving it splendour and impressiveness, the first place must be assigned to the Sacred Chant. We have, indeed, all learnt from experience that it gives a certain breadth to divine worship and uplifts the mind in wondrous wise to heavenly things. Wherefore the Church has never ceased to recommend the use of the Chant, and has striven with the greatest assiduity and diligence to prevent its decline from its pristine dignity.

To this end liturgical music must possess those characteristics which make it preeminently sacred and adapted to the good of souls. It must surely emphasise above all else the dignity of divine worship, and at the same time be able to express pleasantly and truly the sentiments of the christian soul. It must also be catholic, answering to the needs of every people, country and age, and combine simplicity with artistic perfection.

All these characteristics, however, are nowhere to be found in a higher degree than in Gregorian Chant — *the special Chant of the Roman Church, who has received it alone by inheritance from the Fathers, has kept it carefully throughout the ages in her records, and commends it to the faithful as her own, ordering its exclusive use in certain parts of the Liturgy.* (Motu Proprio. Nov. 22. 1903. n. 3.)

Certainly in the course of time the Gregorian Chant incurred no small loss of purity. This was chiefly because the special rules of the Chant, as traditionally received from the Fathers, were either negligently overlooked or allowed to be altogether forgotten. Hence arose an evident decline in the spirit which is spoken of as “liturgical”, and the “spirit of prayer”, while at the same time the beauty and grace of the sacred melodies, if they did not wholly disappear, were certainly affected for the worse.

But the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius X. — may his enterprise be crowned with good fortune and success! — emulating herein the zealous endeavours of his pre-

The Father John Brébeuf Hymnal **“has no parallel and not even any close competitor.”**

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— Author for the *Church Music Association of America* weblog • 10 June 2022