

# Encouragement Encouragement



December 2018 – Issue 89

*Carols, Hymns and Joyful Praise*

THE HOST APOSTOLATE  
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Who can doubt the impact of the Carol ‘Silent Night, Holy Night’? It is perhaps the most translated and, in many ways, epitomises the soul of Christmas. Was it not the lone singer of this carol, that brought about an all too brief interruption in the fighting on the battlefield of the First World War, when that soloist, as Midnight fell caused all to stop. Greetings were made and morsels exchanged and then a game of football. Enemies stopped fighting and the power of song especially spiritual ones became manifest.

The word ‘Carol’ means joyfully singing worship and praise. Indeed, all hymns are expressions of our heart’s desire to ‘sing-out’ praise and thanksgiving for God’s kindness to us. This may be telling the life story or a passage of scripture but by adding melody stirs the heart deeply. An Organist, **Sheila Clegg**, of many years devoted service in our church said the following to me about the power of music and song in worship and liturgy. I hope that she will forgive my phrasing. She said that she always finds it amazing that on entry into a church, large or small when music is being played, even as rehearsal, her heart jumps and she is uplifted. Also, when a hymn is being sung that reflects an inner journey it speaks to her and she can sing it from the heart and mind and it causes her to reflect and pray. She also remembered that St Cecilia, (Patron of Music) while being put to death by decapitation, because of the failure of the axeman’s aim, took three days to die during which she sang holy songs to the Lord.

I think that most people can identify with some of these comments. I can certainly do so and have found that in time times of personal struggle or pain, music comes to my rescue. I recall that when I broke my arm rather badly on a very icy night in December when no Ambulance was available, save an ambulance car, so that no pain killer could be given I sang Carols all the way to the hospital joined by my astonished and full voiced and amused driver... “No one has ever done that before for pain relief”.

Is it not sad therefore, that many people still consider music as an unnecessary extra during any kind of Service and a bit of an annoyance? Singing out one’s soul is especially powerful way of prayer because it involves the mind, memory, soul and body. The breathing required can still the body too and make the heart at peace and rejoice. Words are powerful but when music is added the person engages in a special way. The rises and falls of the notes add weight to the words and allows a deeper reflection of the content. Even the repetitive elements are a useful tool to enhance praise. Silence is important but the consequence of silence is often expressed in song, thoughts and feelings having to find an outlet. Many great Saints have composed hymns.

There are many instances of song and music being brought to the fore in Scripture with Psalms a prime example as they are indeed songs. Phrases such as ‘Sing to the Lord’ are frequently found. In the Psalms we have all the feelings and thoughts of people and their prayers. St Paul writing to the Ephesians (5. 19) says ‘address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and make melody to the Lord’ In the book of the Apocalypse the ‘Heavens’ never stopped singing night and day...’ Hold, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty – He was and He is and He is to come...’ Rejoicing indeed at the end of time... (4 1:11) Did not the Angels themselves sing such word as Isaiah looked on... When the Lord saved David, also a musician, from Saul he sang to the Lord in gratitude ... The Lord is my protector and with Him I am safe. (2 Sam. 22). There are many more references such as these, not forgetting the Angels’ song to the shepherds.

An able violinist who has been involved in music in various church locations wrote the following.....

***“What is it about music that touches the soul?”***

As a musician myself, I would say it is because music reflects something fundamental about the



universe and of the nature of God Himself. Scientists tell us that, if we go deep into the nature of creation, down through atoms, down further through quarks, down to the fundamental essence of the physical universe, we find ourselves in a strange world of energy, vibrations and waves. The foundation of all we are physically, is – well, movement! God said 'Let there be...' - and there was light, there was movement, there was creativity, there was a coming together, there was creation, there was life, the beginnings of you and me. What a funny thought - we are, all of us, the product of vibrations, waves and movement, coming together in harmony to form molecules, cells - and life.

And if you wonder what this has to do with music, and why music resonates with us, it is because it reflects the harmony of creation, the beauty of sequence, the foundation of order. When someone says such and such 'strikes a chord' these are not careless words; ideas and memories resonate within us. When Orsino (Shakespeare, Twelfth Night) laments 'If music be the food of love, play on..' he reflects an instinctive link between music and love.

I have a good friend who is a music teacher. She can take the most unruly class, or those excluded or banned from other lessons – and with music, she tells me, they are often soothed, tamed, quietened and calmed... For they too are finding a natural rhythm, a harmony, 'an at-one-ness' with creation...

I am not saying that God 'created' music (although 'let there be music' would have been a nice addition), but I am saying that music is the by-product of the way the universe is. And socially, music can bring people together, cross boundaries and borders, encourage peace, and restore harmony. There is something very 'kingdom of God-ish' about music!

**Steve Murphy**

A few times in the course of his ministry that '*Special Pastor*' has reminded folk that singing is part and parcel of any liturgical celebration. He quoted St. Augustine with his famous quote "He who sings prays twice." This is a very good thing to remember.+



So sing with all your heart at Christmas and always. Reflect on the wonder of God's gift of music and voice. Thank Him for being able to express ourselves in this way and bring joy and pleasure to the heart and that of others.

**Halina Holman**

### **Pope Francis**

"Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humour. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit." (Gaud Ex. 122)--  
Singing is good for one's soul and, as St. Augustine says, Christian life is not a sad path but a joyous one that is done "singing and walking," Remember this: Sing and walk "And in this way, your soul will enjoy more the joy of the gospel."

(To 6,000 young choristers, their families, friends and choirmasters from 18 countries, 2015)

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"Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticles, these watery varieties of sounds and silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle, must somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb, and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must float like a feather on the breath of God." St. Hildegard of Bingen

### **Feasts in December**

**2<sup>nd</sup> First Sunday of Advent (Year C)**

**3<sup>rd</sup> St. Francis Xavier**

**6<sup>th</sup> St. Nicholas, Bishop, 7<sup>th</sup> St. Ambrose, Bishop**

**8<sup>th</sup> Immaculate Conception, Blessed Virgin Mary**

**9<sup>th</sup> Second Sunday of Advent**

**12<sup>th</sup> Our Lady of Guadalupe**

St. Jane Frances de Chantal

**13<sup>th</sup> St. Lucy**

**14<sup>th</sup> St. John of the Cross**

**16<sup>th</sup> Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete)**

**23<sup>rd</sup> Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**24<sup>th</sup> Christmas Eve**

**25<sup>th</sup> Nativity of the Lord**

**26<sup>th</sup> St. Stephen, 27<sup>th</sup> St. John, Apostle**

**28<sup>th</sup> Holy Innocents**

**29<sup>th</sup> St. Thomas à Becket, 30<sup>th</sup> Holy Family**

**31<sup>st</sup> St. Sylvester**

AS WE AWAIT THE JOY OF CELEBRATING JESUS' BIRTH  
MAY ADVENT BE A TIME OF PRAYER AND REFLECTION  
LEADING TO A HAPPY CHRISTMAS FILLED WITH PEACE  
AND BLESSING FOR EVERYONE ! HALINA

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