

Music at the St JP II Polish Center 7:15AM Mass

----- Quick reference -----

the Rite

The mass is offered following the 1962 form of the Roman Rite, sometimes called “Extraordinary Form”, “Tridentine” or “Traditional Latin Mass”.

The Roman Rite distinguishes two categories of solemnity: High Mass, and Low Mass.

The 1962 Missal is very clear on what singing is necessary, allowed or forbidden at High Mass and at Low Mass. This contrasts with the 1970 Missal which adopted a concept of “progressive solemnity”.

The official songbook of the Roman Rite is the **Graduale Romanum**. The 1974 edition contains mostly the same music as the 1962 edition, but sorted through a revised liturgical calendar.

In the 1962 form of the Roman Rite, you can easily recognize whether you are attending **High Mass** when these are sung: the dialogues, the prayers, the readings, the Ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Agnus Dei) and the Credo. A cantor or schola also sings the Proper of the Mass (Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Offertory, Communion).

At **Low Mass**, none of the above (dialogues, readings, ordinary or proper) can be sung.

In anticipation of the “progressive solemnity” the **Sung Low Mass** gained popularity in the first part of the 20th century. The singing is then devotional, not liturgical. Low Mass rules apply.

At High Mass, only the homily is not in Latin. All singing is in Latin.
At a Sung Low Mass, hymns in other languages than Latin can be sung.

the Language

Why Latin? We follow the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church. The Roman Rite is in Latin.
A common ritual language is a sign of the unity of the Church.

the Singing

The human voice is necessary for the liturgy. Musical instruments are not.
Chant is sung speech. Gregorian Chant is the liturgical chant of the Roman Rite.
Chant results from the union of the breath (Spiritus) and the Word (Logos).
Trinitarian symbolism is omnipresent in Gregorian Chant.

Church tradition created the 4-line staff, square notes and solfege to teach its sung liturgy. These are still the most efficient techniques to learn to sing the mass.

I hope you found the above helpful. To participate more fully to High Mass, please continue reading...

Participating in the Liturgy

Participation is emphasized in both St Pius X's *Tra Le Sollicitudini* (1903), and in the 1958 instructions on music in the liturgy: *"By its very nature, the Mass requires that all present take part in it, each having a particular function"*. Participation depends on: 1) the level of solemnity chosen, and 2) the individual preparation of parishioners to match the solemnity.

We read that the 1962 Missal defines the levels of solemnity. The 1958 instructions on music also define **degrees of participation** for both Low Mass and High Mass: 1st degree is expected of all the baptized present, 2nd degree of participation of most, 3rd degree only of those most prepared. The time necessary to prepare varies with the music. In choosing the music, the necessary music defined by the Liturgical books (ex: Graduale Romanum) always has priority:

"The preparation and performance of unnecessary music must never prejudice the complete and careful presentation of the necessary music. It is strictly forbidden to truncate or omit any part of the prescribed music in order to make way for extraneous offerings. Similarly, it is very wicked to hurry through the music of the Mass, so that something else, no matter how beautiful in itself, may be included" (Psallite Sapienter – paragraph 10c)

To make the best use of time in preparing liturgical music, it is useful to distinguish three stages of preparation, working backwards from the time when a specific liturgy is to be sung:

1. Sing-through: Time must always be taken before the liturgy to check that the music is ready, both individually (best done at home to save rehearsal time), and as an ensemble.
2. Learning new music. The liturgical calendar is predictable. When we assess honestly our skills, we know how long it takes to learn a new song. We can then start preparing individually early enough to be ready in time for a specific liturgy, at the degree of participation we choose (1st and 2nd degrees in the assembly, or 3rd degree with the schola).
3. Fundamentals: solfège and the 4-line notation were invented a thousand years ago for the very purpose of singing the mass. Their efficiency is proven. These learning methods are accessible for free to every Catholic. The necessary music of weekly High Mass cannot be learned by rote. To sing High Mass regularly, a schola must be able to read 4-line notation.

Hired help: It is common practice to hire professional musicians to help parishioners prepare. There is a risk that such hired help becomes a proxy to the participation of the faithful.

Instrumental support is now often seen as necessary to the singing of the liturgy. This is a new development readable in Church documents. In 1903, piano playing was forbidden in church per St Pius X's *Tra Le Sollicitudine*. The 1958 instructions were forbidding the use of any instrument during Advent, Lent, Holy Week and during funerals. A-cappella singing is the music proper to the liturgy. Yet, pianos are now omnipresent in churches and can be heard in all liturgical seasons. The looser rules issued since 1967 to grow participation in singing are now hiding the decline in singing skills. The denial of this decline is made easier by the availability at our fingertips of professional recordings. To face reality, we need only silence the instruments and listen to the voices. The wisdom of the 1903 and 1958 rules is then obvious.

For Catholics, the change that happened after the Vatican II council in music can be summed up as follows: learning to sing the Credo, Gloria and at least two Kyriales became optional. It is now acceptable to not even try to sing the 1st and 2nd degree of participation at High Mass only because of the Vatican II reforms. Learning (discipleship) is a process that takes time, and is an individual decision. We can help. Please ask the members of your parish's choir how they prepare, and how they can help you prepare.