

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES AND THE SUNG PROPER

In addition to the various rubrics and positions of the ministers, the MC must also have an intimate knowledge of the order of the Gregorian chant propers and its consequent effects upon the Mass, that is, the duties of the choir. An MC is truly not a *master* of the ceremonies if he is unaware of these important details. The best way in which to gain a working knowledge of these items is to actually learn to sing them. However, where that is not possible the best alternative is to make a concise study of the propers, their order, what they sound like and even what they look like in notation.

The propers especially affect the position of the MC when he must signal the Celebrant:

- That he has sufficient time to sit at the Sedilla.
- When he must signal the Celebrant that it is time to return to the Altar.

The two instances in which both of these circumstances take place are:

1. (If a very long *Kyrie* [e.g., a polyphonic one] is sung followed by the plain chant *Introit*) After the said *Kyrie* until just before the sung *Gloria*¹.
2. After the said *Gradual, Alleluia* (or *Tract, Sequence*) until the imposition of incense; this is where the rule of *Remaining 4 Lines of Chant* is used.

In places where the propers are not sung in plain chant, but rather in *psalm tone*², the two opportunities listed above that would normally allow the Celebrant to sit at the Sedilla are omitted due to a lack of available time. This *irregular*³ method of rendering the propers is sometimes called *Rossini*, after the priest who converted all of the plain chant propers into psalm tone.

REMAINING 4 LINES OF CHANT RULE

When the *Gradual*, and *etc.* is sung in plain chant, the MC must know what the appropriate cue is to signal the Celebrant to return to the Altar.

The rule for this is simple and it applies to both a *Missa Cantata* or a Solemn High Mass⁴: On the 4th remaining line of chant of the last proper to be sung before the *Gospel* (either the *Alleluia, Tract* or *Sequence*), choose a word that will be easy to distinguish during the singing of the piece.

However, one should note that *Sequences* are sung at a slightly faster rate than an *Alleluia* or a *Tract*, and so the MC should choose a word from the 10th remaining line instead.

In both cases, the goal is to ensure that enough time exists for the Celebrant to rise from the Sedilla, go to the Foot, genuflect, ascend to the Altar, impose and bless the incense, say the *Munda cor meum* (or the Deacon instead, if it is a Solemn High Mass) and then go to the Gospel side to chant the *Gospel*. There should not be a long pause between the ending of the *Alleluia* or *etc.* and the *Praeconium*⁵ of the *Gospel*.

¹ This circumstance is extremely rare. However, when it does occur, the MC should use the beginning of the 2nd of the last set of *Kyrie eleisons* as the cue to signal the Celebrant to return to the Altar to intone the *Gloria*.

² This is called psalm tone as it follows the same modes as used for singing the psalms during the Divine Office, like Vespers.

³ None one should think that psalm toning the propers is a regular method. It is only allowed for specific reasons, two being; if the propers are difficult to render (which the *Gradual, Alleluia* and especially the *Tract* usually are) or if a competent choir is lacking altogether.

⁴ The only difference with the Solemn High Mass, is that the various actions before the *Gospel* are divided up amongst the Deacon and the Celebrant. However, it still takes the same amount of time to perform as compared to a *Missa Cantata*.

⁵ *I.e.*, the *introduction* or title of the *Gospel*. *E.g.*, "*Dominus vobiscum*", "*Et cum spiritu tuo*", "*Sequentium...*" "*Gloria tibi, Domine.*"