Serving the Liturgy:
Facilitating an Encounter with the Holy through Liturgical Music
By Steve Angrisano
The last section on the sacraments in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts Matrimony and Holy Orders together. The reason for this might come as a surprise to many who receive these sacraments. They are alike because in neither case are they ultimately about the people being ordained or being married. Talk about a counter-cultural vision! For Matrimony, the wedding may help with the salvation of the couple, but primarily it is for the service they will offer the Church as parents and as a witness to how the Church might be built up in our time. But more on matrimony in the coming article.

For ordination, the introduction (1534) is clear—being a Deacon, Priest, or Bishop gives no special advantages when it comes to personal salvation. At the last judgement, God will not ask if anyone has been a Priest. The only way it helps, incidentally, is that an ordained person may have dedicated his life more fully the service of others. That the *Roman Martyrology* (the official list of saints in the Church) has more Bishops, Priests, and even a few Deacons than it does lay people might make us question this assertion. However, in reading the accounts of these saints, their ordination is mentioned only in passing. What mattered was what they did: took the place of those being sent to the death camps in World War II, dedicating a life to serving the needs of the poor, or the myriad other ways we can serve each other.

Therefore, from the beginning, music for ordinations should have a stronger sense of the opportunity that ordination gives for a life of service. Certainly, the *Ubi Caritas* in any of its forms is an appropriate selection, as is Benedictine Delores Dufner’s strong text, “The Spirit Sends Us Forth.”

The section specifically on Orders begins with the assertion that Orders are a continuation of the apostolic ministry (1536), and that while it is one sacrament, it comes in three degrees. This means that all three of these celebrations – for Deacon, Priest, and Bishop, are apostolic in their orientation and sacramental in their transmission. This is also dealt with in the section (1554-1571). The inclusion of Bishop as a degree of this sacrament may seem obvious now, but in the pre-conciliar system there were seven degrees of order which did not include Bishop. (Porter, Lector, Acolyte, Exorcist were ‘minor’ orders—Subdeacon, Deacon and Priest were the major orders). Sadly, the restoration of the degree of Bishop as degree of Orders returns it to a pastoral ministry at a time when many Bishops I have spoken to long for the opportunity to be more with the flock that is entrusted to their care instead of to the immense burden of the administration of a diocese.

The history of Orders is a bit complicated. The unique priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus is strongly affirmed (1544-1545), and is assigned to all the faithful, as well as in a particular way to those in Orders (1546-1553). Still, this notion of the priesthood of Christ is tied to the notion of priesthood in the Old Testament. In that tradition, these priests performed
animal sacrifices at a single sanctuary in Jerusalem. Catholic Christianity and so the current prayers for ordination for all three degrees make a specific reference to the Levitical priesthood, but more as a model or a prefiguring of what the Church does today. What does this mean, both liturgically and musically?

References to service in the Temple, like Roc O’Connor’s recent gem, “One Day within Your Temple,” would be a great way to reference this aspect. And since Jesus is the source of the service of the baptized and the service of the ordained, it makes sense to make use of at least one of the songs from that section of our repertoire – songs that we sing regularly to celebrate the loving service of all God’s children. Luke Rosen’s treatment of “Forth in the Peace of Christ We Go,” with text by Jesuit Father James Quinn would be a powerful replacement for “O God beyond All Praising,” which has become the standard anthem, at least at the ordinations I have attended.

There are many important moments in the ordination rites, so let’s look at a few of them. One is the exchange of peace – the Catechism (1537-1538) makes it clear that ordination welcomes the newly ordained into an order – a group. In the last few decades, we have become aware of the order of catechumens, but there are other orders among the laity in the history of the Church, like widows and penitents. The welcome by means of the ecclesiastical embrace reinforces this teaching, and if it goes on for a time, a song of blessing might be in order, trying to express in song what the other members of that order are saying in words.

Reaching back to a teaching made at the council of Chalcedon in 451, the Catechism describes the celebration of ordination of any degree as a celebration of the particular Church – what we would normally call a diocese – because the ordination is for the diocese, not the personal possession of the individual. Those preparing the liturgy should make every effort to have “as many of the faithful as possible to take part” in that celebration (1572). This teaching points to the importance of the affirmation of the particular Church of the choice of those for ministry, and it points to the importance of the prayer of the whole Church through the Litany of the Saints.

A quick word for musicians about the litany: you may need to be a bit creative to ensure you get the litany right. The wonderful “Litany of the Saints” by Barbara Bridge has made sure that the intercessions for those to be ordained are included. Use these and not the ones for the Order of Christian Initiation. In addition, you may have to be a bit creative with the lists of saints. The ordination of a Bishop includes all the Apostles, while the Ordination of a Deacon separates Saint Francis from Saint Dominic, and adds Saint Vincent. Why, you ask? Saint Francis was ordained a Deacon, not a Priest, and Saint Vincent is one of the important examples of Deacon Saints in the Roman Martyrology. With a little attention to detail, you’ll be sure to have the community praying for the right rite.

Finally, as the ritual unfolds, the central liturgical act of all ordinations is the laying on of hands (for a bishop it is the laying of the Book of Gospels) on the heads of those to be ordained. I like to use this liturgical moment as evidence of the most powerful prayer in the Christian tradition, which is the prayer of silence. While there are explanatory prayers, at the key moment the ordaining prelate prays in silence. Silence is so powerful because it is completely democratic. It requires the prayerful attention of everybody. Without the participation of all, it is no longer silence. Enter as fully as you can into this moment. If it is a hot summer day, turn off the fans for the ordination rite, and any electronic stuff that is making a buzzing sound. Instruct all those who are serving in any ministry to model this attentive silence. And for goodness sake be sure that everyone’s cell phones are set to silent mode!

Because ordinations are important events in the life of a diocese or a religious order, there should be a strong sense of collaboration in all aspects of preparing this liturgy. Of course, the interests and taste of those to be ordained should be taken into consideration, and so should the choices that the Bishop celebrant is allowed to make. If the ordination takes place at the cathedral church, there is probably a well-organized system in place for these celebrations. But, and this is especially the case for diaconate celebrations, should the celebration be held at the home parish of one or more of those to be ordained, things are different. To have these celebrations around the diocese helps with vocation awareness, so it is a common practice. When the celebration happens in a place where ordinations are not regular occurrences, then collaboration between diocese and parish, and sometimes even those responsible for the formation of the candidates for ordination, should be considered essential. Issues as mundane as parking can deflate the joy of these celebrations. But walking through every element of the celebration and being aware of all the requirements for space in the building – for clergy, for the rites themselves, for all those who serve at the liturgy – all of this is crucial, since any one of these can throw a curve ball. Talking early and often will ensure that when the unexpected happens – and it will – everyone is able to keep things flowing in a prayerful manner for the whole assembly.