

# HOW WE USE GREGORIAN CHANT

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The Second Vatican Council specified Gregorian Chant be given a “pride of place” in Catholic Music. In The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific® we feel successful whenever we are told that we included chant “seamlessly.”

Our Schola has never sung a Tridentine Mass – the older “Extraordinary” Form still used with special permission. Our knowledge both of the chant and of the New Liturgy enables us to use Gregorian chant more freely and creatively than specified in the detailed rubrics of the 1962 pre-Vatican II ordo for a Tridentine Mass.

Many of our chants are sung from memory. Our young adults have been growing up singing the stately Christmas Day Introit, Puer Natus Est, and the jubilant Easter Sunday Sequence, Victimae Paschali Laudes, all our 46 years as an ensemble. In implementing Vatican II, we “never let go of the chant,” but began using it all the more freely and creatively along with the vernacular.

Some Gregorian acclamations are in the culture of the Schola. When we are ready to leave the warm up room to sing Mass or a concert, the choirmaster intones, “*Procedamus in pace*,” “Let us proceed in peace.” The Schola responds, *In nomine Christi, Amen*, “In the name of Christ, Amen.” This invitatory appears in the Tridentine Liturgy only once -- Palm Sunday. We chant it all the time to begin a procession, as was done in the Gregorian centuries.

Ecclesiastical Latin is now more popular with young people than with an older group. Most of our young choristers hear other languages all the time, besides English. Our child choristers from Hispanic families consider Latin to be, simply, “Spanish with funny endings.” The study of the Latin texts helps the children learn Phonics, improving their Reading skill. Our choristers of high school and college age, have an experience in Linguistics, as we compare the Latin with modern English and Spanish, translating back and forth.

One of our surprises is that the same chant sounds so different sung by different sections of the Schola. The chant sounds completely natural sung by children; unaffected. The same chant is declamatory by the men, melodic by our high school boys and girls, reflective sung by the ladies of our choir. Gregorian Chant is a variegated, fascinating musical art, as contributory to effective Liturgy as the visual interior of a church. Chant is an auditory contributor to “worship space.”

But can congregations participate? The answer, a qualified Yes: If taught gradually, through repetition, explained well, introduced by quality Schola performance at a “listening time” such as before the Liturgy. The congregation grows used to hearing the chant, step-wise participates increasingly till the congregation has attained its role. This is especially true of the Common of the Mass, which congregations can sing wonderfully. Instrumentalists help by improvising on the chant melodies, done for centuries by organists, now increasingly by contemporary cantoral groups. What a joy congregations have who comfortably join in chants like Rorate Caeli (Rain down, You Heavens) in Advent, or Hosanna Filio David (Hosanna to the Son of David) on Palm Sunday. Nothing compares with joining in “songs” sung for centuries at times and seasons of the Church’s Year of Grace.

We have no debate with those who prefer the beautiful Tridentine Mass. But our goal as a Schola is to meld the classic and the contemporary in Catholic and Ecumenical Music – seamlessly, and yes, normatively.

-Fr. Ted Ley, SM