



The Nature of Liturgical Chant

1. *Cantus* – “song speech”
 - a. The “Speech” is from Christ to the Father, in the love of the Spirit.
 - i. Hence it must first be true (in its theological content) to what the Son and “speaks” to the Father, in the Spirit.
 - ii. This eternal “song” (containing Word and Breath) has been made knowable to us by means of the Word “singing” to His Bride, the Church.
 - iii. But also its form must be true to that eternal dialogue.
 - iv. Hence, it is the method of the dialogue of Trinitarian love, which gets sacramentalized here on Earth.
 - b. It helps vest the words so they can be experienced and received correctly (i.e. as worship between God and creature)
 - c. Even more than sacred architecture, it is an expression of worship itself.
 - d. It is intimately connected with the act of worship itself.
 - e. It is primarily vocal, since it is the praying breath and word from the People of God.
 - f. It is at the service of the Word, and makes that Word more “know-able” (the basic meaning of “noble”); it is a vehicle for the Word, and is at the Word’s service.
 - g. It dilates the meaning of the Word, and thereby makes the Word more efficacious to penetrate minds, hearts, and memories.
 - h. Whereas religious and popular songs give us a window into the mind of the composer, chant is anonymous, and fits the nature of the Liturgy:
 - i. Entering into the inner “song” and dialogue of the Trinity.
 - i. Whereas religious and popular music can fit into other settings, chant makes no sense outside of the context of worship.
2. Its Content is From God, To God, and About God – Sung Theology
 - a. From God – God’s own Self-Revelation, as can be handed down by the Church.
 - b. To God – Our human response; and an exercise of the baptized priestly office in Christ (remember: “Pray brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father.”)





- c. About God – NOT just “God-words,” but gives experiential knowledge of the Trinity.
3. 5 Characteristics:
- a. Irreplaceable Value of the Human Voice
 - i. How can you worship, without speaking?
 - ii. Word and Breath together more perfectly express the movements of the heart.
 - b. Sung Speech
 - i. The Word/text is primary; and the music/melody grow out of the text, making the Word more know-able.
 - ii. “the music is *in* the words”
 - c. Objectivity
 - i. Starts with the actual objective reality expressed in the Words.
 - ii. Also gives us access to previous generations, who have prayed the same chants.
 - d. Holiness
 - i. It has been hallowed by its intimate association with the Word of God.
 - ii. It has never been confused with other forms of human activity.
 - iii. It is a sign and bond of communion of us with the saints of previous generations.
 - e. Fosters Conscious and Active Participation
 - i. Simplified – it puts the words of the Liturgy on the lips of the people.
 - ii. It assigns different parts to different members of the hierarchical Body of Christ.
 - iii. It reveals the essential nature of the Liturgy – Head singing to Members; Bridegroom to Bride.
4. All leads us to sing the Mass, vs. sing *at* the Mass. This will prepare us for Heaven, since we have already been listening and participating in this life to the “Song” of the Heaven at the Mass.

