

# 7 Truths You Need to Know if You're Part of a Parish Choir

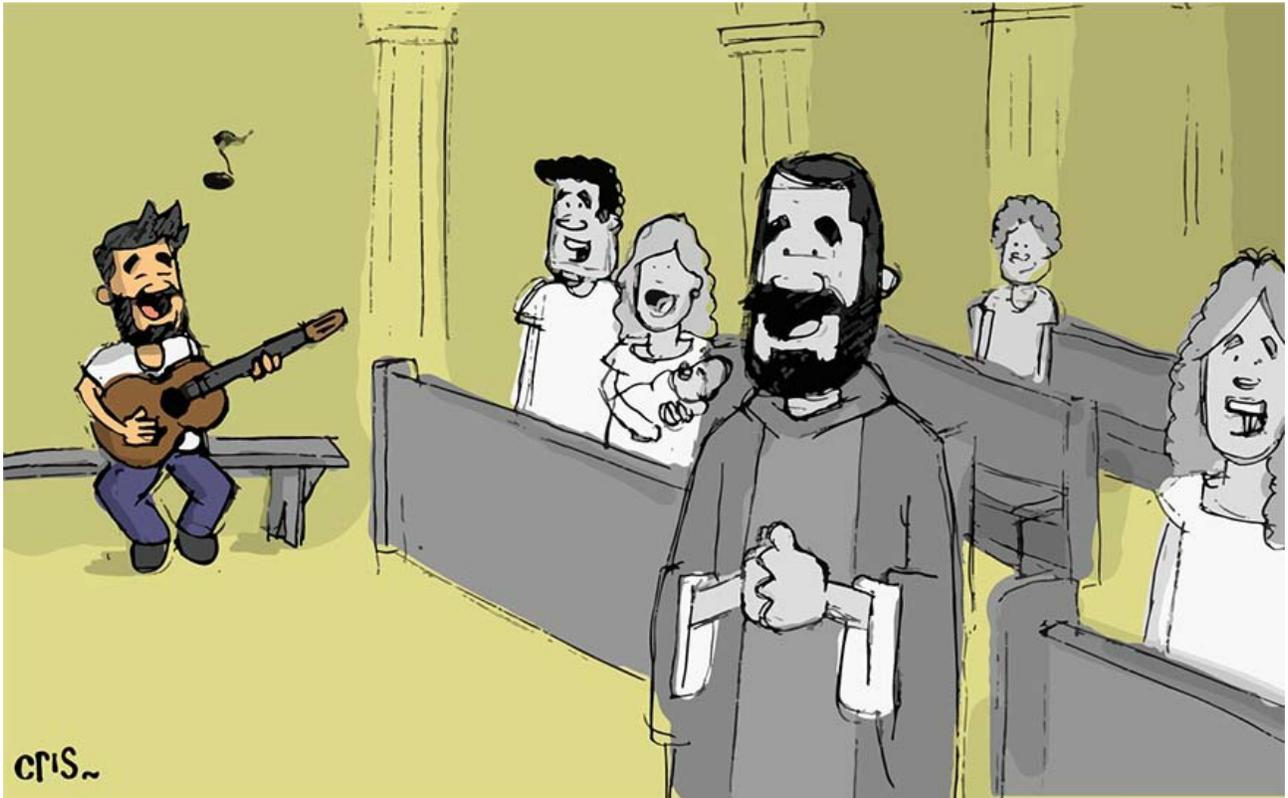
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A few years ago, I belonged to a choir, but for different reasons I had to leave it and commit to other things in the field of evangelization. However, I have continued educating myself and that's why I would like to share with you some **points to reflect on and to bring a better service to the Lord**. The choir in a Mass is very important, but it's also important to know the full sense of the Mass and to correctly participate.

In order to be in a choir you should not only sing beautifully, but also have **liturgical formation**. The Mass has a way and sequence, and the Church, apart from being a mother, is also a wise teacher since She has been, for almost two thousand years, guiding us towards the right road of our sanctification. It is the Church who teaches the way in which a liturgical act must be performed. I share with you here some ideas that are sometimes forgotten by those who are (or were at some point) a part of a parish choir.

## 1. The Mass has its own time, not ours



The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM #37) tells us that there are songs which are rites in themselves, such as the “Gloria”, the responsorial Psalm, the “Alleluia”, the “Sanctus”, and some others. This same section explains that there are chants which accompany a rite, such as the Entrance, the Offertory, and the Communion. **The choir must**

**respect these moments and not extend the chants longer than necessary.** The Entrance chant, for example, has the function of accompanying the ministers' entrance procession (Cf. GIRM, 47). Therefore, it must extend to the ministers' procession and the incensation of the altar (when there is one). Once this rite is over, the entrance song must end, in order to avoid adding unnecessary verses. Another example is the Communion chant: it must last as much as the distribution of the communion to the faithful does, and shouldn't extend until the purification of the sacred vessels.

## 2. Not every chant is liturgical

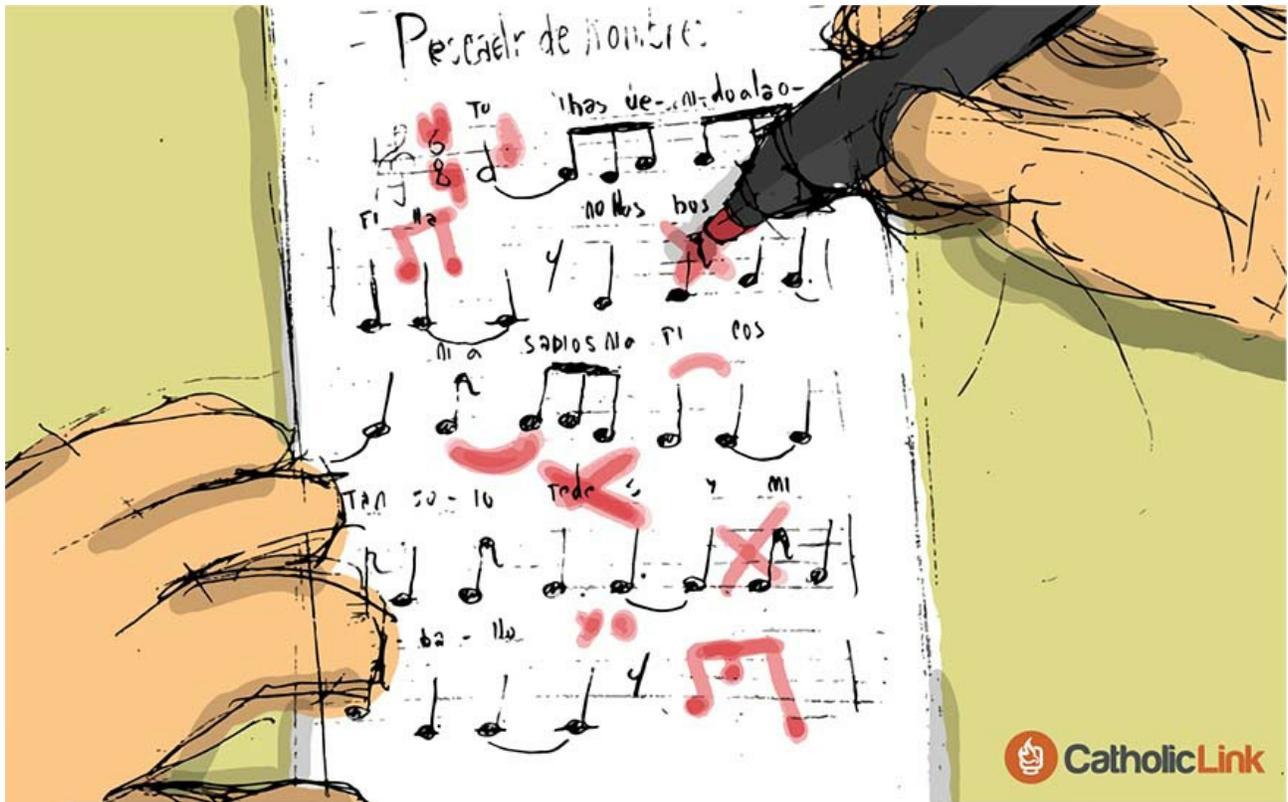


There are extremely beautiful chants that are performed “*ad hoc*”, depending on the situation or even on the Gospel. However, our task as the choir – especially in the planning stages – is to investigate if what we’re singing is appropriate for the liturgy. The Church gives us guidelines to discern this through the document *Musicam Sacram*. Number 4 says:

*“By sacred music is understood that which, being created for the celebration of divine worship, is endowed with a certain holy sincerity of form”* (MS,4). From this we can infer that for a chant to be appropriate for the Liturgy, it should have been written in music and lyrics fitting for that celebration.

Therefore we should avoid songs that, although Catholic, weren't created for that end or with that intention. Let alone songs of other denominations of Christianity. Don't be discouraged, there's an infinity of chants at everyone's reach which can replace the non-liturgical songs on your repertoire.

### 3. The chanting must be faithful to the text it presents



Just because a chant says “Glory to God”, “Alleluia”, or “Lamb of God” doesn’t necessarily mean it should be used in the Holy Mass. The chant must be faithful to the text it presents, for example:

*“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will... Lord God, heavenly King, Almighty God and Father, we praise You, we bless You, we adore You, we glorify You, we give you thanks for Your great glory,. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; You are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of the Father. Amen”.*

**We can’t modify the Church’s ancient prayers so that the chant sounds better or prettier** (cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 121). I repeat: don’t be discouraged if a chant on your repertoire isn’t faithful to the prayer’s original text, try to replace it with one that is.

### 4. There is no chant for the sign of the peace



In August of 2014, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a document titled “*The Ritual Expression of the Gift of Peace at Mass*”, in which it’s expressly asked in number six that “*in any case, it will be necessary, at the time of the exchange of peace, to definitely avoid abuses such as: the introduction of a “song for peace”, which is non-existent in the Roman Rite*”, since the **sign of the peace must be a brief moment that doesn’t distract the assembly from The One who’s really important and who’s present in the altar at that moment.**

## 5. The “Lamb of God” starts when the priest fractions the bread

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CPS~

**This chant doesn't accompany the peace, it accompanies the fraction of the bread.** The GIRM tells us in number 83: *“This invocation accompanies the fraction and, for this reason, may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has reached its conclusion, the last time ending with the words dona nobis pacem (grant us peace)”*.

## 6. It's not enough to be merely physically present



CPS~

Sometimes, we who are part of a musical ministry or a parochial choir **forget that we also participate in the Eucharist.** Being in the back of the church or by the altar, we might get distracted or preoccupied, but the biggest miracle of love is happening right in front of us. Besides, if it's Sunday, the precept is to fully attend Mass every Sunday, it's not only about being present. Participate not only by singing but also by listening to God in the Gospel and the homily. If you already do this, set a good example and help others to do it too.

## 7. We are the Church's servants, not Her stars

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You surely know this already, but I think it's essential and prudent to mention it. The service given in a choir must be done with humility, since we aren't there because we are the best nor because we wish to stand out. Remember, **the center of the Mass is Christ**, not our voices. We should seek to serve, not stand out nor receive applause (least of all during the Mass), since the gifts we have are freely given to us by God and should be put to the service of others for the glory of God.

With this advice, I don't pretend to impose my ideas, instead I want to show you what the Church teaches, She who is incredibly wise... Much wiser than us! Neither do I pretend to motivate your choir's dissection, but the opposite: I want to encourage you to grow and give a better service. I invite you to read the cited documents and share them with others. Don't forget that **"how we treat the liturgy decides the destiny of faith and the Church"**(J. Ratzinger). I send you a big hug and my prayers. Please, don't forget to pray for me.

*This post by **Bernardo Dueñas Moreno** was published by Catholic-Link Spanish ([here](#)). It has been translated into English by **María Isabel Giraldo**.*

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