

The Catholic Weekly Review.

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CANADA

Reddite quæ sunt Casaris, Casari; et quæ sunt Dei, Deo.—Matt 22: 21.

Vol. VI.

Toronto, Saturday Mar. 5, 1892.

No 4

Sacred Song in Catholic Worship.

A LECTURE BY FATHER RYAN, S.J.

At a musical vesper service at St. Michael's Cathedral, Toronto, on Sunday evening, Father Ryan gave an interesting lecture on Church music and song. The Rev. Father said in part:

In keeping with the service of the evening, he would speak on the subject of sacred song in Catholic worship. He had, he said, to meet a difficulty at the outset, for the lecture of the evening had been already given by the cathedral choir, and given admittedly well. Indeed a lecture on song should be sung. Music has an eloquence all its own, and eloquence that best explains itself. The poet had sung with mirth and beauty.

"Music! oh! how faint how weak
Language fades before thy spell
Why should feeling ever speak
When thou canst breathe her soul so well."

Yet something may be said about music, and especially about sacred music and song. The origin and history, the science and art, the power and pathos, the use and abuse of church music would each afford interesting matter for a discourse. He would not speak of any of these. He would take a more simple, popular and practical view of the subject, and would ask his audience to consider the soul and the heart and the home of song. All may not be singers, but all like to hear a good song. And all like to have a soul in the song, a thought and a truth in the song: and a kindly soul, a cheering thought, a consoling truth, for all like to have a heart in the song. And as we are exiles here in this land of sorrow, we want a song that tells us of home. These are the things that make a song popular and these are just the things we find in the songs of the Catholic Church. She puts soul and heart and home in her songs: the soul of melody, the heart of melody, and the home of harmony. Faith is the soul of melody; hope the heart of melody, and love the home of harmony.

There is such a thing as material mechanical music: music that has no soul in it. This was the music of the morning of creation before man was called from the deep sleep of nothingness. God rather saw than heard this music. He saw indeed that it was good, but wishing it to be perfect, wishing to hear it He said: "Come, let us make man." The material world was like a musical instrument, ready for the touch of the Master's hand. "To His image God made man;" a compendium of all creation, material and spiritual, man stood upon his feet a living soul, touched the chords of creation's harp, and put mind and soul and meaning in its song. So Israel's royal singer after having invited the heavens, the earth and the sea and all that dwell therein; the rain, and hail and snow and the spirit of the storm, to sing God's praises, takes care to complete the chorus by adding:

"And thou my soul praise
Thou the Lord."

The first characteristic of this soul-song is simplicity. The soul is a simple spiritual substance. It sees through the surface and takes hold of the substance of things, passes over

the particular and makes the universal its own. This is why its song is simple, plain and Catholic. The spiritual soul takes hold of the substance, the believing soul takes in the supernatural, the divine. There is faith in its song and therefore its tone is firm: the *cantus firmus*, the plain or Gregorian chant, the priest and popular song of the Catholic Church.

She has her matin, midday and evening song. The song of the morning is the priestly song the ecclesiastical or divine office, a model of monody, the song of the believing soul. The opening prelude to this great song is a prayer, and the prayer is a lesson to all who sing or speak God's praises, and should be well known by Catholic choirs. "Open my mouth O Lord to bless Thy holy name, cleanse my heart from all idle, vain, distracting thoughts, enlighten my mind, inflame my heart that I may, with devout attention, worthily sing this song of praise."

Then two chanters begin the song, the full choir joining in the chorus. "Come let us praise the Lord with joy," the chanters sing, "for the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods, for in His hands are the ends of the earth, and the heights of the mountains are His." And then leaders and choir unite in grand chorus "come let us adore and fall down before Him, let us catch His eye in humble confession, and in psalms let us sing to Him." And so this magnificent native song goes on, a model of the simplest kind of ecclesiastical music. There is soul and muse in this song: there is faith and humility and penance and prayer in it. God is in it, and it is worthy of Him, truly divine. This was the song of the early Church. This was the music of the grand *Te Deum* that so moved the soul and heart of the great St. Augustine in the cathedral of Milan. This music Pope St. Gregory the Great improved and made perfect, and gave as a heritage and a glory to the Catholic Church.

But the *cantus firmus*, the monotone of faith may do for the simple to believe. The Christian soldier needs a war-song, a song that has melody, has heart and hope in it. Such a song the Church gives her children. The first note of this song was sounded by the warrior angel of God, St. Michael, when the great battle in Heaven began. *Quis est Deus!* Who is like to God? In a moment the battle was ended and the song of victory went on. *Quis asce. let in montem Domini*, "Who will ascend the mountain of God?" "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," came soft and clear from the virgin singer of Nazareth. *Et Eturqueus Maria* and rising to the full height of her divine maternity she sang out that magnificent canticle, *magnificat anima mea Dominum*. It is a song of the soul, a song of the heart. It sums up all the old songs and is a fitting prelude to all the new. It went up from earth to heaven and brought the Angels down to sing their *Gloria in altinamis*, glory to God: peace on earth, good will to men. These three thoughts, these three notes make all earthly music perfect.

The Angels song show clearly that the music of heaven is choral. For with the angels who led that Xmas choir there was a multitude of the heavenly host, all praising God and singing, &c.

The Angel choir went home to heaven, but their song was caught up by the exiles of earth and shall ever be continued in the Catholic Church. It is her midday song and is heard in that sacred opera, that divine drama, the grand High Mass. The melody of the Mass, the purest and most perfect specimen of true Church music, is preserved on the altar and is heard in the preface.

In the song of the morning, the ecclesiastical or divine office, the leaders invite all earth to join them. In this midday song of the holy Mass, the celebrant singer ascends to heaven. In his sacrificial character of a priest of the Most High, he enters the Holy of Holies, moves up through the ranks of the angels and takes his place before the eternal throne. He is going to exercise the awful power of his priesthood, to ask the Eternal Son of God, who is seated at the right hand of the Father, to come to earth again, to bid Him who once became flesh, to now become food. Overawed by his nearness to the Godhead, and conscious of his own weakness and sinfulness, the priest asks earth and heaven to help him in a sublime sacrificial song. *Sursum corda* he sings to his people, "Lift up your hearts," *Habemus ad Dominum* they answer, "We have then lifted it up to the Lord." The rev. priest implores the aid of heaven and unites his voice with the choir of angels, archangels, thrones and dominations, cherubim and seraphim, who sing without ceasing the hymn of God's glory. *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts." And then as priest and people await in awful silence the coming of the King, the angel choirs continue: "Lift up your gates ye princes and be ye lifted up ye eternal gates, and let the King of glory come out." And another choir answering asks, "and who is this King of glory?" The first choir replies, "the Lord who is strong and mighty, the Lord who is mighty in battle," and then repeats the first command, "Lift up your gates ye princes," &c. And the second choir sings in joyous wonder, "Who is this King of glory?" Then comes the full chorus. The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory. And even as they sing the Lord of Hosts, the Son of battles comes to earth again to make His home for a time with His people here, that they may make their home with Him for ever hereafter.

The home-time is the evening time, and the home song is the vesper hymn. The grand choral congregational evening song, *Laudate*, had been sung. It was a lecture in itself. After the blessing of the King and His people, comes the sweetest home song, the song of the Sacred Heart. Harmony is concord and concord is two or more hearts beating as one. This concord is perfect. This harmony eternal, divine, when one of those hearts is the heart of God.

Such is the harmony the Catholic Church would have in all her sacred music. Such the sweet concord she desires in all her choral and congregational songs

...Rev. Peter Trimble, C.S.S.R., who won so many friends whilst giving missions in this city some four years ago, was in the city last week. Many took advantage to renew acquaintance with him.