

## *A Coffee with Alessio*



**“Here am I Lord, I come to do your will.”**

I'm not sure about you, but I find it can be a challenge to be a church musician. For that matter it's not easy fulfilling any ministry within the Church these days. This is not because I don't enjoy what I do. On the contrary, but sometimes I find it a challenge because some people just aren't interested in the message of faith. Times have changed. Being a church musician doesn't seem to carry, in my opinion, the same status in this country as others. I think that's a shame really, because it is definitely a privilege to lead God's people in song.

There are two reasons why I think being a church musician isn't exactly thought of in the same way as being the CEO of a company. Firstly, too many stakeholders just aren't interested in what they're doing. You know how it is with yourselves and your children at home. What you don't feel like doing, you do with no heart and soul. Let's face it, who jumps for joy at the end of a meal and says "I can't wait to wash all those dishes!" The same I believe is with our roles in parishes. We must possess the knowledge, but we must have a willing heart to pass on our knowledge and skills. You see, I from time to time sit in the pew at Mass, because when I'm playing the organ I can't see what the congregation sees. I am too caught up in what I'm doing. When I sit in the pew I have the time to think and observe. I have had positive experiences and not so positive experiences. I have been to Masses where the same songs are repeated week after week. I believe that's boring! To say the least, and isn't going to *inspire* anyone either! There has to be a balance between repeating music over and over and singing new hymns each week. It also

gives the impression that the musicians are just going through the motions. The music should relate to the liturgy of the day. (That's a topic for another column). So if we want to be taken seriously as Church musicians then we need to do our part in effective preparation of the liturgy. This may involve teaching the congregation a new song. There are a couple of ways you can do that. You could either teach the refrain just before Mass, by call and response, or play it through a couple of weeks in a row at some point in time at Mass just as an instrumental piece. In this way the congregation will get to hear the tune and have it implanted in their minds. You'll be surprised at how quickly they'll pick up the tune.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the youth are the future Church of tomorrow. So if the youth aren't coming to Mass now, pretty soon our church's will be empty. The Church has so much to offer, but we need to let people know what we're doing. As church musicians we need to practise and prepare music so we are at the top of our game at Mass. That one Mass could be your opportunity to "evangelise" someone, so don't waste it! Similarly, parishes should have Facebook pages and make use of other social media that engages their youth in the activities going on in their parishes for the youth of their parish. On that note, let the young people do something in your parish, so that they can be active stakeholders in the work of proclaiming the Good News. They may need some guidance, but you need to listen to their ideas too. It would be great if we had an Archdiocesan youth choir comprising people from about the ages of 25-35, that we could use for major Archdiocesan events. They would feel ownership of what they were contributing to the Archdiocese. I think we need to find a balance between traditional and contemporary music in our repertoire. There has to be something for everyone. If you use a new piece of music though, repeat it the following week, then come back to it a couple of weeks later. It will still be fresh in people's minds, but it has been done to death either.

So coming to the title of this week's column. What does that have to do with anything? The title of this week's column comes from the Responsorial Psalm for the Solemnity of the Annunciation, which we celebrated on Monday this week. Mary responded with total commitment and trust to God for His plan for her in her life. As musicians or whatever role we undertake in the Church we must do the same and say **"Here am I Lord, I come to do your will."** That means that we must prepare our liturgies well and find (new) ways of engaging our youth. It's hard I know! But if we want people to take us seriously, then we need to take our work

seriously! Not only that, but we must do it willingly as well, so that people will come to know Christ by the way we joyfully undertake all that we do for the sake of the Good News of the Gospel! For when Pope Saint John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council with the theme of “aggiornamento”, or seeing things through fresh eyes, and letting fresh air be breathed into the life of the Church. This is what he was calling us to do. To keep doing what the Church does well, but to acknowledge and to find new ways of proclaiming the Gospel so that the Church would remain alive.

I think I’ve given you enough to think about this week, as you drink your coffee and enjoy a dessert. Take your parish priest out for a coffee and discuss it with him. You might be surprised at his response! So till next week, enjoy your coffee!

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