

THE CATHOLIC MASS, MUSIC AND WORSHIP

Many people find that music can help them pray, as it can help them express themselves in different ways. Recorded music can support an individual in prayer and live music is often used in churches to help the community bring their prayers together.

The Catholic Mass

The exam will not have specific questions about the structure of the Catholic Mass, however it is useful to know that it has distinct sections.

Which type of music is best for worship?

Through the centuries numerous composers and hymn writers have created music for prayer. There is a wide range of musical styles available, but there are differences of opinion within the Catholic community (and other Christian communities) about what is the best way to use music in prayer.

- Some Catholics would say that traditional Latin music is the best way to appreciate the beauty and majesty of the liturgy.
- Others would say that the older hymns are more appropriate church music and the words of the classic hymn writers are more poetic.
- Others would say that the Church needs to sing in the style of the younger generation, otherwise it is not speaking to them at all.

The Introductory Rites

The greeting, Penitential Act and Collect (also referred to as the opening prayer) that form the beginning of the Mass.

Liturgy of the Word

This part of the Mass takes place at the ambo (a pulpit or lectern). The focus of this part of the Mass is on the readings from the Bible that are being proclaimed. On Sundays there would be three readings, usually one from the Old Testament, followed by a psalm that follows the same theme. The second reading is usually from one of the New Testament 'letters'. The most important reading is the Gospel. The community stands to hear the words of Christ, read by the priest or deacon. The Gospel is often greeted in song. The priest or deacon explains the meaning of the Gospel in the homily (sermon). The community says the Creed together and prays for the needs of the community.

The Concluding Rites

The Mass ends with the final prayers, blessing and dismissal.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The focus is on the altar, where the priest says the Eucharistic prayer.

This is the great 'thanksgiving prayer' that recalls the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is when Catholics believe the bread and wine become the 'body and blood' of Jesus. Catholics refer to this as 'Real Presence' and 'Blessed Sacrament'. The community says the Lord's Prayer together, offer each other a sign of peace and receive the 'body and blood' of Jesus during the distribution of communion.

Knowledge Check

1. What are the four parts of the Catholic Mass?
2. What is the alleluia?
3. What is the gloria?
4. What are eucharistic acclamations?
5. What is the purpose of the eucharistic acclamations? (what do they highlight?)
6. When are hymns typically used?
7. What are the Psalms and what do they express?
8. Which religious communities have built on the Psalms?

Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

Exam Question

c) Explain how and why music is used in the liturgy [8]

Music in the Liturgy:

The Catholic Mass has several elements which are appropriate to sing:

Alleluia



Alleluia: This is a chant for welcoming the Gospel. To acknowledge the importance of listening to the teaching of the Gospel, the congregation stand and the alleluia is chanted. Where possible the alleluia should be sung.

The Gloria



The Gloria: This is a great song of praise for God. The words can bring a greater sense of joy or awe/wonder through music.

Eucharistic Acclamations



Eucharistic Acclamations: These are the chants that the congregation says/sings during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They are the 'Holy, Holy', the 'Memorial Acclamations' and the 'Great Amen'. They punctuate the great prayer of thanksgiving at which the bread and wine become the 'body and blood of Christ'. Marking these moments with sung responses highlights their solemnity and importance. These can be sung in a variety of different styles ranging from the very modern to more traditional styles in Latin.

Hymns



Hymns: There is a wide number of hymns in the Christian tradition. Many parishes use hymns at the start and the end of Mass. Hymns can be appropriate to support quiet prayer at, or after, the distribution of communion. Hymns are also used sometimes to accompany the procession of the gifts of bread and wine before the Eucharistic prayer.

The Psalms



In the Old Testament, the Psalms are ancient collections of Jewish prayers and hymns to God. They express emotions; from joy and praise, to anxiety and despair. These have been sources of prayer for the Christian community since the time of Christ. This is because Jesus, and most of the first Christians, had lived most of their lives as part of the Jewish community. The Psalms would have been important to their worship and it is no surprise, therefore, that they used them in prayer.

The religious communities of monks and nuns built on these types of prayer. Their daily prayers were based around the biblical prayer from the Psalms. Gradually they developed ways of singing or chanting the Psalms to add to the beauty of the prayers. The most famous of those styles is known as 'Gregorian chant'. It is a type of chant that was developed for them to sing together without musicians. Psalms are still sung in monasteries, convents and cathedrals today.

At the Catholic Mass, the Liturgy of the Word includes a psalm selected to reflect the theme of the reading that comes before it. Parishes are encouraged to sing the psalm where possible and many have been set to music by modern composers. Chant versions of the psalms are also available.