



Mass for the 2017 Australian Pastoral Musicians Network Conference Homily

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton
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I am very pleased that the Australian Pastoral Musicians Network Conference is being hosted here in Perth. The local music ministries have looked forward to the conference and so much work has been done to make it a success. It is wonderful to see the enthusiasm and joy in the way that you are participating in the events of the conference.

It was many years ago when I was staying with a Redemptorist community in Paris that I had an experience of the power of song in the liturgy. The chapel of the community was on a lower floor of the building and it was open to the people of the neighbourhood, and twenty or so would come to the Mass each morning. Mass was celebrated quite early, and at that time of the year Paris in the early morning was still dark and chilly.

To my surprise, as the priest entered the chapel to begin Mass, the congregation began singing a psalm. It was one composed by Gelineau. What was remarkable was that they were singing without books or the aid of any technology. They sang without an instrument. And this was the same for the responsorial psalm and other times during the celebration. They knew the psalms and the setting of the music so well that someone only had to start and everyone took up the song.

I thought to myself: this is what liturgy is meant to be. It was so natural. It seemed to be spontaneous. Everyone was caught up in the praise and worship of God.

Some years later, when I was parish priest in one of our metropolitan parishes, the people were encouraged to sing psalms at Mass throughout the week. It became something to be expected and we were helped by the psalms that have been taken up by wonderful modern composers. We chose the psalms that most closely matched our celebrations of the Mass each day.

The beauty of learning those songs that are based on the psalms, is that we sometimes find ourselves caring the tune in our mind, or something has just happened and the words of the psalm pop into our mind. By singing the psalms, we learn their wisdom and receive the encouragement of God through the words. We can keep the Lord close in all we are doing in our day. We are caught up by the Lord and we begin to look at things with his eyes and wisdom.

The Word of God becomes a living word, who is with us to the end, as he promised.

St Paul wrote of this experience as we heard in the reading from Philippians just now. He said that he had been captured by Christ. He was not one of the original apostles. He was in fact a



learned Pharisee who lived and breathed the Word of God in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. His conversion on the road to Damascus was life changing. Paul went from persecutor of the church to apostle and witness of the faith in Christ. The encounter he had with the Risen Jesus, knocked him to the ground. It was shattering. It turned his life upside down. So he wrote that he had been captured for Christ, and thanks be to God for this!

The Word of God, Jesus himself, can capture us and we can become captivated by him. It is possible that the Word can make his home in us.

Music and song are mighty means by which we can be catechised. What we celebrate in various liturgies, the Sacraments, services of the Word and prayer are not only adorned by song but their meaning for us is brought out more fully and captured in our consciousness.

I am sure that the conference has been able to reward you with new insights as you have reflected on the place of music and song in our services of praise and worship of God. I pray that you continue to reflect on what you have learnt, discussed in so many ways and practised together in these days. Let us carry back to our parishes and communities the enthusiasm to serve our people with our music. May our liturgies, especially, lead us into the mystery of God and enable us to be fully engaged in prayer at all levels of our being.