

The Lingua Franca of Paradise

A culture that primarily communicates by texting is twice removed from music. How so? Have you noticed how in musicals, they sing most when their emotions are at an all-time high (or low, if it is a sorrowful scene) as if to say that ordinary speech cannot do justice to the rich texture of their complex emotions. I honestly do believe that Adam and Eve would ordinarily communicate with each other through music. When they were at the height of their human energy (which was most of the time) they would not merely speak to each other – they would **sing** to each other.

Just think about it. If they were “in tune” 24/7 with each other, with the rest of creation and with God, then why not resonate in unison, 24/7? Music was the lingua franca of paradise. Plain speech became the norm after the Fall. Now, if plain speech is fallen music, then texting is indeed ... twice removed from music. In the former fall, we lost the melody of music; in the latter, we’ve lost even the sound of music.

If you find these musings difficult to believe, at least believe the wise words of a former Pope. In a speech he gave in 1985 in Rome, titled *Liturgy and Church Music*, Pope Benedict XVI said:

“Liturgical music is a result of the demands and of the dynamism of the Incarnation of the Word, for music means that even among us, the word cannot be mere speech.”

And if you still find such musings too farfetched, allow us then to at least appeal to a Saint – one of those who actually knew and taught music:

“Music stirs our hearts and engages our souls in ways we can’t describe. When this happens, we are taken beyond our earthly banishment back to the divine melody Adam knew when he sang with the angels, when he was whole in God, before his exile. In fact, before Adam refused God’s fragrant flower of obedience, his voice was the best on earth, because he was made by God’s green thumb, who is the Holy Spirit.”

St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

The Word became flesh to restore creation’s lost symphony. As a matter of fact, some ancient church traditions say that on Easter Sunday morning, Christ burst out of the tomb singing. We can perhaps add that since then, he has been eagerly waiting for creation to sing back.

The Mass itself is a song; it is meant to be sung. At Mass, Christ sings to the Father. The Gospels tell us of one time when Jesus sang: when He institutes the Holy Eucharist (Cf. Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). We should not be surprised, that Christ sings when He institutes the Sacrament of Love, and that for the vast majority of the past 2,000 years, the various parts of the Mass have been sung by priests and lay faithful. The Mass is most itself when it is sung. In the mid-1960s, the Second Vatican Council strongly encouraged a rediscovery of the ancient concept of singing the Mass:

“The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, No. 112. Vatican Council II