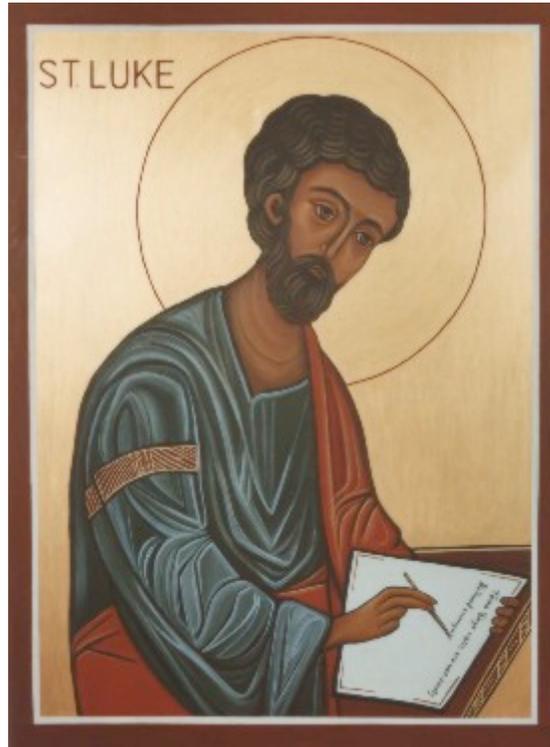


choir notes



Upcoming Events

Nov. 21–Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple
Warmup at 8:30 AM
Liturgy at 9:00 AM

Nov. 25–Thanksgiving Liturgy
Warmup at 5:00 PM
Liturgy at 5:30 PM

Rehearsal Schedule

Mondays at 7:00 PM
Sunday Warmup at 8:15 AM

A Casual Approach to Liturgical Singing...

...is a concept in conflict with the Orthodox Christian tradition of worship. We are instructed to approach the chalice with "fear of God, faith and love." The deacon intones this just before we walk up the aisle to receive communion. However, one might say that our approach to the chalice begins with "Blessed is the Kingdom."

We are not required to spend the liturgy covering in fear. Our liturgical tradition is one of great joy and celebration. There is also a certain amount of humility, prayerful dignity and reverence that goes

along with the role that we play in leading the worship.

That's why it is important that we are prepared musically and spiritually to sing. We give our very best every time we gather to express the faith—whether we are rehearsing or leading the congregation in worship. We don't chatter and distract one another. Our attitude and posture are important. We approach the chalice with arms folded in humility, so we shouldn't spend the preceding time during the liturgy with arms crossed or hands in pockets.

This newsletter continues with Bp. BASIL's comments on The Ministry of Church Singers.

As always, I am thankful for your dedication to this sacramental ministry. Please pray for our choir and especially for me.

–Andy

In This Issue

Bp. BASIL's "The Ministry of Church Singers" Continued

"The fact that you have started to chant is not important. The roosters out on the farm sing like anything. They will drown you out right away. But you are not a rooster, and you are not a hen. You have to remember that your singing should not be like that of a rooster, but like that of angels, that is done, with humility, fear, ardent love, and self reproach. Such is true and God-pleasing chanting. But the vainglorious kind, designed to please not God but men, is worse than those of roosters. And this is precisely what you did not specify for me, that is, whom did you come closer to in imitating, when you chant, the angels or a hen?"

(A quote from St. Anatoly Zertsaley of Optina, written to a new choir member)



(The following is taken from the newsletter PSALM: Pan-Orthodox Society for the Advancement of Liturgical Music, Spring 1996, written by Bishop BASIL)

I love to remind our church singers of the fact that we physically jump into something that goes on perpetually. We jump in and join with the angels for a couple of hours, and then we jump back out. The liturgy does not begin with "Blessed is the Kingdom" and your "Amen," and it doesn't end with "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers" and your "Amen." Those phrases only define the time that we participate in the liturgy which goes on perpetually before the throne of God.

We've been told that singers should listen to each other for a good blend. The tenors should listen to each other, and then the tenors should listen to the sopranos. The sopranos ought to listen to the altos, etc., etc. That's fine for the street. For the church singer it is not the tenor, alto, or soprano who stands next to you we need to listen to, but the angels who lead us in our singing. Those are the voices we need to hear and with which we blend our voices. What can sound beautiful to us can sound like cacophony at the throne of God, if we are not singing with the angels.

St. John Chrysostom tells us that while the priesthood is something that takes place here on earth, and is an ordinance established here on earth, yet it is something that is super-heaven, because the priest and the deacon do that which angels dare not do. The angels stand in awe, not at the priest or bishop or deacon, but at

what they've been permitted to do by God's grace. If John Chrysostom wrote a book on choirs, as he did on the priesthood, I'm sure he would say that while being a choir member, cantor, or reader is something earthly, it is also something heavenly. That the angels stand there, perhaps not in awe, but at least with a little bit of jealousy, because you who are flesh and blood have been called upon to serve in the same ministry that they have been created for.

It's a holiness. It's not your ministry. It's a ministry that belongs to the Church, and you respond to the call as well as recognize that the gift which you specifically fulfill in the church was, traditionally, and in some sense still is, an ordained ministry. The choir was not some club that existed in Church for those with some particular musical talent. To be a church singer was an ordained office within the Church. Canon 15, from the Council of Nicea, the Council of the 4th century, makes its point clear that only canonical singers should be appointed for that kind of ministry in the Church. That means "one set apart" for that particular ministry. Today we might call them Readers. While I'm not saying that every choir member must be a tonsured Reader, I do say that if we fulfill at least the spirit, if not the law of the Canon, that each choir member ought to see his/her participation in the choir as seriously as the ordained clergy take their ministry. I don't know any priest who thinks that he can say on some Sunday, "I don't want to serve because I want to sit with my wife," or, "I don't feel like serving today," or, "I'm angry, one of the altar boys offended me, so I don't want to serve this morning."

As seriously as the ordained clergy need to take their ordination, so you ought to as church singers. Canonically, they are an order of

the Church, to begin with. I'm not proposing that we fulfill the letter of the law by having you all ordained, but I think we ought to at least incarnate the spirit of the law, which implies a great responsibility, a great sense of duty and a privilege that is given to him or her as a church singer. This, then, should create in all of us, whether or not we are ordained clergy, a real sense of humility. We should give thanks that God has been pleased to call us who were created from the dust of this earth to participate in the heavenly liturgy and to offer up praises with His angels to join the perpetual hymn of "Holy, holy, holy."

We jump in and we jump out. Some of us jump in on time and some of us jump in a little bit late. In my opinion, being in church for that first "Amen" is a sign, an indication of one's humility. And where humility is, indeed, a virtue, its opposite is a sin. The sin is not disturbing other people. The other people in the church are not the object of our worship. It is rude, but not necessarily sinful, to disturb other people. But it is sinful to be presumptuous and prideful that one can jump in and sing with thousands of archangels and ten-thousands of angels at one's own whim. "This Sunday I feel like singing, and next Sunday I won't sing. I want to sit with my wife." Leave that Hallmark-card kind of sentimentality for restaurants, concerts, and cinemas. You sing with angels. We stand before the throne of God, and when we realize that, every other consideration, all of our own personal likes and dislikes, become secondary. I'm giving my opinion now, and hopefully it humbles all of us. It's a humiliation, that in its end, should be something that elevates us, that exalts us, something that gives us wing. (To be continued...)