

## SERMON – Rev Anne Taylor

Music is a very personal and I imagine for many it is one of the ways that people have coped over these last months. You can get lost in music whether it is Beethoven or the Beatles. Whether in the car it is Classic, Smooth or Rock FM. Whether you can play an instrument, sing in tune or like me can do neither you can still love music.

Music can have a spiritual dimension. It has the ability to make us feel very close to God – it helps us worship and even get lost in awe and wonder and praise. Hymns can be very powerful and connect us with God. Hymns are also very personal and provoke strong feelings of likes and dislikes – whether it is a favourite tune or a hymn that brings up memories like The Church's One Foundation or Shine Jesus Shine. As a Vicar you can never please them all when selecting hymns.

It is appropriate that we mark Music Sunday and give thanks for all those who have written and composed, played and sung over the years and still do.

In the church that Ted and I served in Rathfarnham, Dublin there was an unusual stained glass window. The window was of Saint Cecilia.



Saint Cecilia is the patron saint of musicians, composers, singers, Church music, poetry and musical instrument makers. Her feast day is celebrated on the 22nd November.

In Rathfarnham Church St. Cecilia's window faced the choir stalls, no doubt to inspire them. When the sun shone the simplicity of the window let so much light into the church it created a real glow. But I often wondered why Cecilia looked so miserable and it had nothing to do with the quality of the choir for as in St Peter's they are very good. Cecilia's face is sad because she was martyred for her faith.

According to legend, Cecilia was a young Christian of high rank and had an arranged marriage to a Roman named Valerian. She had protested at this marriage as she made a vow of celibacy. But through her influence Valerian was converted, along with his brother. But both were martyred for organizing proper burials for other martyrs. Cecilia's death would follow as she refused to worship false idols and continued to openly worship God.

The source of the connection between Cecilia and music is obscure and does not seem to date back much before the 15th century. Innumerable paintings and stained glass windows depict her solemnly with an organ, lute or viola.

However the connection arose, it soon became lodged in folklore, and by the second half of the 16th century festivals and celebrations in her honour (and that of music in general) begin to be recorded. She has inspired many musicians and writers throughout the centuries, from Benjamin Britten to Simon & Garfunkel. The old £20 note withdrawn in 2010 had on the back Saint Cecilia and the composer Sir Edward Elgar.

The great influence of Cecilia is that she has become a symbol of the Church's conviction that good music is an integral part of the liturgy, of greater value to the Church than any other art.

Our lives would be poorer without music. But so would our worship for music has a spiritual quality - a quality that takes us out of ourselves, that suggests something deeper, helps us to draw closer to God.

Singing is not simply a technique but a gift that God gives to all his people. If we were part of the Orthodox Christian tradition, all our services from beginning to end would be sung. As it is we sing hymns and these hymns are meant to help us focus our minds on worshipping God.

In normal times during the Eucharist the choir sing as the congregation receive communion. This is not there to fill a gap but to help the congregation to focus on the significance of communion with God. It is there as a form of prayer.

When large crowds of people come together to support their team they sing as a way of expressing their sense of community and support for their team. And hopefully very soon a certain YNWA will be sung from many roof tops!

Christians also sing as sign of unity, as a sign of community. Singing gives a shared identity, and we hope that when services resume again, singing will also be permitted as we recover that sense of community.

Music in worship also teaches us. We retain our sense of what it is to be Christian, partly through singing hymns and partly through the doctrines we absorb through melody and rhythm. Both Martin Luther and John and Charles Wesley clearly understood the teaching function of hymns. And that a good hymn with good sound teaching and a fine tune is worth many sermons.

It is so important to make sure the songs that children sing help them learn positive Christian messages. For children to sing songs that have catchy tunes and good teaching they remember and they learn. In fact we all do.

Hymns can teach us so much - sometimes without us even realizing it.

Hymns can lay the foundation of what we know and believe about a loving God. And down the ages, particularly when men and women have been subject to cruelty and oppression, music has given them hope. From the Jewish ghettos of twentieth century Europe, from the cotton fields of the enslaved American south, from the Salvation Army hostels of nineteenth century East London, singing hymns of praise have lifted people

spiritually, have bound them together in a common cause, re-affirmed their sense of God, helped them to survive spiritually and morally even when their life was difficult.

Today we give thanks for music and how we can be inspired as generations have to use music to help us draw closer to God. In these times when we cannot easily gather let music still bind us together – don't worry what the neighbour's think – let us sing out in praise of a God who loves us and who will sustain us through the days and weeks ahead.