

Mass for the 40th Anniversary of the St Mungo Singers  
November 4 2011

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It must seem hardly believable to some of you that four decades have passed since the St Mungo Singers were founded in 1971 by the quartet of Fathers McGinty, Trainer and Fitzpatrick and Kathleen Donnelly to promote liturgical music in the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

It was my predecessor Archbishop Scanlan who gave the choir its name – the St Mungo Singers, and his successor, Cardinal Winning who first sought to use their services for major Archdiocesan events.

I, myself, have been graced to have had the support of the St Mungo Singers throughout my time as Archbishop, from that opening service of Vespers in February 2002 until today... and I hope a little longer yet!

In all of those 40 years the dedication, reliability and commitment of the St Mungo Singers have never failed. You have helped provide the music here in Glasgow for two Popes, three Archbishops, countless Provosts and councillors, and thousands and thousands of people in those years – all in the effort to raise minds and hearts to God from whom the gift of music comes.

Your presence at countless liturgical events, and more recently on the wider civic and ecumenical stage, has been a great blessing for the Archdiocese and the city of Glasgow. And so I am delighted to be able to thank you publically for your service on this special anniversary to mark your 40<sup>th</sup> year.

The words of the First Reading come to my lips as a fitting expression of the gratitude we all feel on a night like this ... “The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace”

If life begins at 40, as the saying goes, you have much to look forward to!

As I thought about this homily I couldn't help but reflect on the phrase sometimes attributed to St Augustine – you will have heard it translated as “He who sings, prays twice.”

In fact it would appear the citation is wrong. The original phrase is in Latin and the modern language versions leave out an extremely important little word: *bis orat qui bene cantat...* "he who sings well prays twice."

Well I think I can safely say that your performances over the years and indeed tonight allow us to use the correct phrase in your honour ... by singing well, you help us pray twice over!

As I said the authorship of that phrase is dubious, but if Augustine didn't write it, did he write anything similar that gave rise to the phrase?

He did write, "*cantare amantis est...* Singing belongs to one who loves" and that is surely your experience over 40 years.

Augustine's commentary on psalm 72 offers us a lovely insight into the spiritual value of liturgical music. He writes: “For he who sings praise, does not only praise, but also praises joyously; he who sings praise, is not only singing, but also loving Him to whom he is singing. In the song of the lover there is deep love.”

I have no doubt that many of you have deepened your own spiritual lives quite considerably through your service with the St Mungo Singers and will relate those words readily to your own lives. As St Paul reminds us in the second reading, liturgical song is the fruit of a grateful heart and a living faith:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

That deepening of personal and communal spirituality must surely have been assisted by the combination of new and old musical pieces which has marked your repertoire over the years.

How wonderful to be able to sing the haunting melodies of Gregorian chant; to master the complex harmonies of polyphony; to keep alive the old hymns of our youth; to discover the richness of our Celtic heritage and to be able to learn new compositions which enrich and transform our understanding of the liturgy and the scriptures.

That is your task and you perform it admirably!

In all of this a balance has to be achieved, enabling that “full and active” participation of the laity which the Fathers of Vatican II desired, while at the same time giving to those musical forms the Church considers her own the “pride of place” which the Council Fathers also willed.

I am sure that over the years the balance has not always been easy, but if we look at the forms and styles contained within our liturgy this evening, then I feel confident in saying that the vision of the Council has been faithfully put into practice

The introduction of the new translation of the Roman Missal, which becomes fully implemented on the First Sunday of Advent should be seen as an opportunity to develop still further your repertoire and produce new compositions which are dignified and fitting for the worship of God.

In the Gospel we have just heard, Christ speaks clearly ...

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

For 40 years the St Mungo Singers have produced good fruit; fruit which abides and which, we pray, will continue to flourish, and flourish always, like this great city, by the “praising of his name and the preaching of His word”.

Amen