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MASS OF MERCY:  
A CHANT MASS FOR CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

Joel S. Kumro

The inspiration for *Mass of Mercy* was drawn from the *Kyrie* from Mass XI (*Orbis factor*). I became acquainted with Mass XI while working at a large parish in the Diocese of Buffalo, New York. This parish celebrated weekly the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, also known as the Tridentine Mass, or traditional Latin Mass.

My work with the Extraordinary Form provided an opportunity to explore the great wealth of chant belonging to the Church. Mass XI is found in the *Kyriale*, which contains chant settings of the Ordinary of the Mass (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*). According to this resource, Mass XI is primarily used for ordinary Sundays throughout the Church year. The title *Orbis factor* comes from the first invocation that was once used in the *Kyrie*: “Maker of the world, King eternal, have mercy upon us.”

Although this Mass XI has been used primarily for Ordinary Sundays, I envision using this setting for use during penitential seasons because of the strong penitential significance of the title, and *Kyrie* from which it takes

its inspiration. For this reason, a *Gloria* has not been set. Although a *Gloria* is not included, this is not meant in any way to limit the usefulness of this setting. In this case, a simple *Gloria* could be chanted, such as provided by the chants of the Roman Missal. Furthermore, there are several occasions where no *Gloria* is needed even outside of penitential seasons, such as weekdays.

Shortly after becoming introduced to the Mass, I became especially attracted to the *Kyrie*. The minor tonality (mode I) and melismatic (many florid notes on a syllable) runs in the text are used to great effect to provide a rich and dramatic setting. The runs on the words *Christe* and *eleison* (Christ, mercy) are particularly evocative in communicating the importance of this text. Together, these compositional techniques evoke our pleading for Christ's mercy during the Penitential Act. Inspired by these elements of the *Kyrie*, I chose to make this the foundation of a new Mass setting. It was also the inspiration for the title of the Mass: *Mass of Mercy*.

This setting is to be chanted in unison by the assembly, or the choir and the assembly together. The lack of choral harmonization again emphasizes its Gregorian influence. Still, a skilled director may utilize chant performance techniques, including *organum* (chanting with open intervals,) to enhance the performance. The *Kyrie* has optional directions for the cantor and assembly in dialogue. However, the singing of this setting in unison can emphasize the assembly's full, conscious, and active participation, as encouraged by *Sacrosanctum concilium* and other Church documents on the liturgy. Organ or piano accompaniment is optional. It can be useful when teaching the acclamations to

the assembly, or if the assembly is not yet comfortable singing without accompaniment. With a confident assembly, this setting will be quite elegant sung *a cappella*, further enhancing its flexibility. An assembly that sings with confidence may even sing this setting without leadership, perhaps at a daily Mass.

The *Kyrie* in this setting is taken directly from Mass XI. The only modifications to adapt this movement into the setting are the repetitions (twice each instead of three times, with the final *Kyrie* differing from the first), and the English translation. Each liturgical musician will need to make a pastoral decision whether to use English or Greek, or perhaps even to sing them in alternation between the cantor/choir and assembly.

The Gospel Acclamation uses the same theme as the first *Kyrie*, and contains three alleluias. Not only is this customary, it is also a Trinitarian reference. A Lenten acclamation is also provided as an alternative to the alleluia. The *verse before the Gospel* can be easily adapted and sung each week using a psalm-tone-like verse that matches the tonality of the refrain. Because the *Kyrie* theme is central to this setting, I thought it was imperative to include it unmodified in the Gospel Acclamation. It serves not only to connect to the *Kyrie* that precedes it, but also to bridge into the next acclamations, which at times deviate from the *Kyrie* themes. With the musical foundation being set by this point, it makes it easier to introduce new thematic material.

In the setting of the Holy, I chose again to utilize the *Kyrie* theme exactly for the first phrase. In this instance, it works quite well with the text of the Mass. Note that the long descending melismatic passage on the word “Lord” serves to emphasize and outline its importance, while evoking a musical depiction of the Incarnation. In the next phrase,

we deviate from the *Kyrie* theme. On the text “heaven and earth,” I chose to use a *cruciform melody* (see figure 1,) sometimes also referred to simply as a *cross motif*, *cross figure*, or *circulatio*. This is a profound motif I have encountered several times in classical music that literally creates a cross in the score. By using this figure, I am referencing Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, where heaven touches down on earth to transform ordinary bread and wine into his body and blood. In order to emphasize the word “full,” and the earth being full of the Lord’s glory, this word contains the highest note in the phrase.

Figure 1:



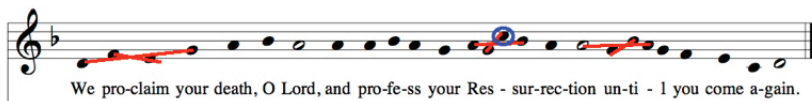
In the following phrase, “Hosanna in the highest,” incorporates the *Christe eleison* theme from the *Kyrie*. In this phrase, the highest note of the phrase corresponds with the word *highest*, therefore allowing for brilliant text painting. This soaring line continues with the *Christe* theme as it flutters back down to the tonic note. With this action, our voices to literally and figuratively ascend to the heavens to sing with the angels.

As the text of the *Holy* continues to the *Benedictus*, the cross motif is incorporated two more times on the text

“blessed is he who comes.” The *Holy* finishes with the repetition of the *Hosanna*, using the theme exactly as before. By using this theme in the same way twice on the same text, it reinforces the strong imagery mentioned above, and allows for the assembly to make a music/text correlation to what they have sung before.

For the Memorial Acclamation, I set the text “we proclaim your death.” This acclamation does not include any direct thematic references to the *Kyrie*, but retains the same key and tonality to allow the assembly familiarity and context. Because of the importance and symbolism of this acclamation, I’ve included the cross motif three times (figure 2.) This references Trinitarian theology, and comes at three important parts in the text: “We proclaim;” “Resurrection;” and “until.” The accentuation of “we proclaim,” communicates the communal nature of worship and celebration of the Eucharist. The emphasis on “resurrection” and “until” highlights the importance of Paschal Mystery, our expectation of the second coming, and the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

Figure 2:



Notice also the melodic figure found in the word “Resurrection.” In it is contained not only the highest note of the phrase, but also the largest ascending interval between notes. Here, the assembly evokes the Resurrection by their singing.

Finally, the *Lamb of God* is written to bring this setting of the Mass full circle. It again utilizes the themes from

the *Kyrie* of Mass XI exactly, with the addition of the conclusion “have mercy on us,” and “grant us peace.” Note that with each invocation of “Lamb of God,” a different theme from the *Kyrie* is used. Each *Kyrie* theme begins differently, but shares a common ending. The same motive is used on both “*eleison*,” and “you take away the sins of the world,” thus creating a profound connection between mercy and Christ’s taking away of our sins.

Using the thematic material of the *Kyrie* in the order it was written was effective for the *Lamb of God*, allowing the word “God” to be more elaborate and florid with each repetition.

Composing *Mass of Mercy* offered me the great privilege of taking something with great personal meaning and transforming it into a useful and realistic Mass setting for modern assemblies. Because *Mass of Mercy* is based on a chant, it will help acquaint assemblies with this style. It is my hope that this setting may serve as a vehicle to inspire a greater use of chant in contemporary worship. Eventually, this setting may be complimented or even replaced by chant settings of the Ordinary of the Mass, such as Mass XI *Orbis factor* that inspired this composition, as well as many other chants in the Church’s repertory. With this in mind, it is my hope that one day chant will once again be a common feature of mainstream liturgy, allowing parishes to further utilize the great riches of chant that have faithfully served the Church for centuries.

# Kyrie

## Cantor

1. Ky - ri - e, e - - - le - i - son.  
2. Lord, have - - - mer - cy.

The musical score for the Cantor part consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It features a melodic line with a long, sweeping arch over the first two phrases. The piano accompaniment is in two staves (treble and bass clefs) and provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines.

## 2 Assembly

Ky - ri - e, e - - - le - i - son.  
2 Lord, have - - - mer - cy.

The musical score for the Assembly part is similar to the Cantor part, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It includes a melodic line with a long arch. The piano accompaniment is in two staves (treble and bass clefs).

## 3 Cantor

3 Chri - ste, e - - - le - i - son.  
3 Christ, have - - - mer - cy.

The musical score for the Cantor part continues with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It features a melodic line with a long arch. The piano accompaniment is in two staves (treble and bass clefs).



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4 Assembly

Chri - ste, e - - - le - i - son.  
Christ, have mer - cy.

5 Cantor

Ky - ri - e, e - - - le - i - son.  
Lord, have mer - cy.

6 Assembly

Ky - ri - e, e - - - le - i - son.  
Lord, have mer - cy.

### Gospel Acclamation

Cantor

1. Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.  
2. Praise and glo - ry, to you, Lord Je - sus Christ.

2  
(Ver - se of the day)

## We Proclaim Your Death

Assembly

1

We pro - claim your death, O Lord,

This system contains the first line of music. It features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower two staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a quarter note on G4, followed by quarter notes on A4, Bb4, and C5, and ends with a half note on Bb4. The piano accompaniment consists of a sustained bass line in the left hand and a treble line in the right hand, both starting with a half note on G3 and ending with a half note on Bb4.

2

and pro - fess your Res - sur - rec - tion

This system contains the second line of music. The vocal line continues with quarter notes on C5, Bb4, A4, G4, and F4, ending with a half note on E4. The piano accompaniment continues with a sustained bass line and a treble line, both ending with a half note on E4.

3

un - til you come a - gain.

This system contains the third line of music. The vocal line continues with quarter notes on D4, E4, F4, G4, and A4, ending with a half note on Bb4. The piano accompaniment continues with a sustained bass line and a treble line, both ending with a half note on Bb4.

## Lamb of God

### Assembly

Musical notation for the first system, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Lamb of God, you take a-way the sins of the world, have mer-cy on us."

Musical notation for the second system, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Lamb of God, \_\_\_\_\_ you take a-way the sins of the world, have mer-cy on us."

Musical notation for the third system, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Lamb \_\_\_\_\_ of God \_\_\_\_\_ you take a-way the sins of the world,"

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4

grant \_\_\_\_\_ us \_\_\_\_\_ peace.

4

Detailed description: This musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a single treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. It contains a vocal line with five notes: a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F4. The notes G4, A4, and B4 are grouped by a slur, and the notes G4 and F4 are also grouped by a slur. Below the notes are the lyrics 'grant \_\_\_\_\_ us \_\_\_\_\_ peace.' with blank lines for the vocal line. The middle and bottom staves are grouped by a brace on the left, indicating a piano accompaniment. The middle staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature, containing five notes: a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note G4, and a half note F4. The bottom staff is a bass clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature, containing five notes: a half note G3, a quarter note A3, a quarter note B3, a quarter note G3, and a half note F3. The notes G3 and F3 are grouped by a slur. The final note F3 has a sharp sign (#) above it, indicating a change to F#3.