

Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas
Archdiocesan Musicians' Convocation and Choral Festival
Sunday, 18 November 2012
Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul
Gospel for the Feast of Saint Cecilia: Matthew 25: 1-13

Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep, but at midnight, there was a cry: "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" Now St. Matthew never tells us just who it is who says this, we're only told "there was a cry." Who cried out? Perhaps it was the singers and the musicians who had come for the wedding! We'll never know, but they certainly announced: the Bridegroom had arrived!

A Wedding Feast! That's what the virgin's were preparing for in the parable from the holy Gospel we've just heard. Those who were wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps and entered with the groom when he arrived. A Wedding Feast! That's the place where, on the day of her own marriage, amidst the music and rejoicing of the guests, Cecilia, sat apart, "singing to God in her heart." A Wedding Feast! Now if someone walked off the street into this Cathedral this afternoon, that's what they might think they've come upon. But isn't that what we celebrate in each Liturgy, the joining of heaven to earth, where the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, meets his bride, the Church?

Today, during this second annual Musicians Convocation and Choral Festival, all those who serve our Archdiocese in Music Ministry, gather to ask the blessing of the Lord. While to some this celebration might seem even more glorious than a wedding, it really points us to that other worldly reality. In your service of the Liturgy, in sacred music and song, it is your task to keep your own lamps filled, and so to help fill the lamps of all who participate, that they might encounter the Lord more intimately in Word and Sacrament. In the generous offering of your talents to the Lord, you assist others to pray more fervently, to reflect more deeply on God's Word,

and to welcome more devoutly the bridegroom who comes.

Saint Cecilia, in desiring to remain faithful to her promise of perpetual virginity, at her own marriage feast, was singing to God in her heart that she might be able to keep that promise, despite the insistence of her father that she marry. The Lord heard her prayer, made even more pure and beautiful, because it was offered to him in song. Valerian, the pagan to whom she was betrothed, was himself then converted, baptized, and honored her virginal consecration. Soon after, he gave with Cecilia the supreme witness of total and faithful love of the Lord: they endured cruel martyrdom for the faith. They were prepared to meet The bridegroom.

During these final weeks of the Church's Ordinary Time, all the faithful are invited to be prepared to meet the bridegroom, Jesus Christ. We are reminded that here on earth, we have no lasting home, and that each of us will be called to give an accounting of our lives when the Lord comes to judge. We are challenged to "stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour." For all of us gathered here, who so uniquely serve the Sacred Liturgy, it is our task to allow the Lord to speak to others through us. In your singing and playing, you are not only assisting others to worship worthily, but in the very performance, offering worthy worship to the Lord who comes.

Just a week ago, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, addressed the participants of the National Congress of "Scholae Cantorum" organized by the Italian Association of Saint Cecilia. During this Year of Faith and the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, he recalled that the Sacred Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, teaches "[the musical tradition of the Church] forms a necessary and integral part of the solemn liturgy" (n. 112). Permit me to make my own his words, as I encourage you in your service of sacred music for the Church.

"...I would like to thank you for your precious service: the music you

perform is neither an accessory nor merely an external embellishment of the liturgy; it is the liturgy itself. You help the entire assembly to praise God, to draw His Word into the depths of hearts; by singing you pray and enable others to pray, and take part in the singing and prayers of the liturgy that, in glorifying the Creator, embrace the entire creation.” (10 Nov 2012).

Today and every day, I encourage you, inspired by the very words of Saint Cecilia, with renewed faith, to “sing to God in your hearts.”

In the Gospel parable, the wise virgins were prepared, with the extra oil of virtuous lives well lived, to welcome the bridegroom and enter into the Wedding feast. It was at her own Wedding feast that Cecilia, who desired to remain faithful to her witness to Christ as a virgin, sat apart “singing to God in her heart.” It is here and now that each one of us, singing to God in our hearts, become better prepared for the Wedding Feast of the Kingdom, where the bridegroom, Jesus Christ, awaits us.

“Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”

It’s true that St. Matthew never tells us just who it is who says this, we’re only told “there was a cry.” Who cried out? I would conjecture that it may well have been the singers and the musicians who had come for the wedding! We’ll never know, but they certainly announced the Bridegroom had arrived! May you do just that.

“Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”