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## The Power of a Hymn

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## The Power of a Hymn

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Growing up I attended a Roman Catholic parish that was relatively small. I knew the people that went to my parish my whole life. The comfortable atmosphere at my church was created from a lifetime of Sundays. When I came to Fisher my freshman year, I would see familiar faces at mass in Murphy Chapel. Upon graduating from Fisher in May of 2010, I decided to take an internship at Disney World in Orlando. For the first time I was in an unfamiliar place where I didn't know a soul. I had a difficult time finding a church because they were scarce. Orlando is a tourist area, so there are mainly attractions like malls, restaurants and amusement park and few living necessities like churches, post offices and Laundromats."



*Jennifer Sadallah*

## **The Power of a Hymn**

Growing up I attended a Roman Catholic parish that was relatively small. I knew the people that went to my parish my whole life. The comfortable atmosphere at my church was created from a lifetime of Sundays. When I came to Fisher my freshman year, I would see familiar faces at mass in Murphy Chapel. Upon graduating from Fisher in May of 2010, I decided to take an internship at Disney World in Orlando. For the first time I was in an unfamiliar place where I didn't know a soul. I had a difficult time finding a church because they were scarce. Orlando is a tourist area, so there are mainly attractions like malls, restaurants and amusement park and few living necessities like churches, post offices and Laundromats.

One day I saw a sign for the shrine, Mary Mother of the Universe. It's not a parish because baptisms and weddings are not performed there. Before the shrine was originally founded by vacationers in Orlando, the priests in the area would take candle sticks and hold services at different hotels. Throughout the years, donations were made primarily by visitors and now a beautiful shrine stands in the heart of Orlando.

Before each mass, the priest would always mention the opening hymn. He would joke that it wasn't just music to fill in the time it took him to walk down the aisle. Its purpose was to unite everyone in worship.

The Catholics that attended the shrine were not the familiar Americans I grew up seeing every week, but a collection of faces from all around the world. At the beginning of the mass the priest would ask who wasn't from the area. As I looked around, the majority of the people raised their hands. The priest would call on people and ask "where's home for you?" Answers varied from Ireland, the UK, Mexico, Spain and all over the United States.

I was surprised to feel at home here. It was very large and I didn't know anyone. Yet I was the most relaxed going to this mass than to any other parish. I began to ponder the source of my overwhelming ease...I felt like I knew everyone around me, because we shook hands before the mass, or maybe because everyone just came from Disney World and were very happy. But then it struck me - THE HYMNS! As I looked around, almost everyone was singing! I could actually hear it! It wasn't the low murmur I was used to hearing at previous churches (because people did

not sing or just moved their mouths minus the sound). I felt incredibly comfortable and relaxed. My mind effortlessly absorbed mass without wandering once.

It's spectacular what a mere hymn can do. I reflected a little further and thought about a couple of religious rituals that truly incorporate song. Islamic chants and the whirling dervishes immediately came to my mind. Unity always seems intensely present in these religious rituals. In Islam, everyone kneels down together at a specific time and chants. No matter what they are doing they stop and share in the sacred moment. The whirling dervishes twirl in perfect harmony to music, their minds in concentrated unison.

I'm not sure if this burst of song at Mary Mother of the Universe was due to the fact that most people weren't American or because the hymn was the only thing that could be shared by everyone. Either way, I think that there should be a greater abundance of singing in Roman Catholic masses. After all, we are one voice.

**Prize for this essay provided by**



*Photo by Michael Costanzo*