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QUASI MODO GENITI

In the old Lutheran worship books — 1958's *Service Book and Hymnal*, and before that, 1917's *Common Service Book* — the Sundays after Easter each had LATIN NAMES. So did the Sundays before Easter, the Sundays in Lent. *Laetare* (“Rejoice...!”), *Misericordia Domini* (“The tender mercy of the Lord...”). Those exotic words roll so nicely off the tongue, if you have any familiarity with Latin.

We Lutherans were following Roman Catholic practice, of course, in naming these Sundays. As my old teacher and mentor once pointed out, Lutheran liturgical patterns and practices follow Rome more closely than even Anglicans’ did, in almost every instance. But I digress.

The Latin titles came from the first words of the day’s **INTROIT**, usually a brief quotation from a psalm that helped, presumably, to suggest some themes for the Day. But the Introit itself, in the emerging postwar ecumenical consensus about things liturgical, came to be regarded as a ritual nuisance. It was simply another of our inherited traditions that today no longer makes much liturgical sense. Anciently, the Introit (Latin for “He enters...”) had simply been a full psalm, sung as an Entrance Hymn. Hence the Introit in those earlier Lutheran liturgies was regarded as still another instance of Medieval minimalism: a vestige of a vestige, with no real legitimate past or future.

So, following this ecumenical consensus, the Introit, in our *Lutheran Book of Worship*, was thankfully replaced with its parent, a **FULL PSALM**. And it’s no loss. In fact, it’s a distinct gain. It’s an advantage. Once again, as of old — really old! — we have the opportunity, the privilege, the joy, of singing a full psalm, or at least a good chunk of one, every Sunday. We’re re-claiming our Hebrew heritage. We’re actually using the Bible’s own songbook. Every Sunday. Sunday after Sunday.

And note: The Day’s psalm is intended to be the choir’s chief “anthem” for the Day. Sure, the choir can spend some time, if there’s any, learning and singing some John Stainer choral warhorse. But the choir’s chief responsibility is not to John Stainer. It’s

to those glorious words in the Day's Psalm. Sung with imagination and passion. See in [Essay 71](#) above.

Repeat: The choir's chief **ANTHEM**, Sunday by Sunday, Sunday after Sunday, **IS THE PSALM**. Nothing else. Nothing less. Nothing necessarily more. John Stainer we don't need. The Psalm we do. Sung participatorially, if at all possible, with the people. But I digress.

As I was saying: There's part of me that **MISSES** them, those old Latin names. There's part of me that regards their loss — in *LBW* and presumably in its still-to-be-published successor — as a kind of dumbing-down of our liturgical life. *Septuagesima* I don't miss. That's pre-Lent, presumably "seventy days" before Easter (a preparation for a preparation?). But I do miss *Misericordia Domini*. And it's kind of nice to recall that the Sunday after Easter, the Second Sunday of Easter, is *Quasi Modo Geniti*: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk [of the Word]...". Of course, even to **THINK** in those terms is to betray my own Medievalist elitism, my own liturgical and linguistic snobbery. But I digress.

That old Latin title for the Sunday after Easter is what I'm driving at in these paragraphs, interrupting my serialization of WW '72. The **QUOTATION** in the Introit is not from a psalm, but rather, as is sometimes the case with Introits, from the psalm's antiphon or refrain. That antiphon is a quotation from *1 Peter 2:2*. And it contains a lovely metaphor. Those who were newly baptised at Easter are imagined here as "newborn babes" in faith, enjoined to desire "the pure milk" of the Word... Neat, huh? (Have I told you my definition of a fundamentalist? A fundamentalist is someone who cannot deal with metaphor, someone who has a difficult time with figures of speech. But I digress.)

Here is one of those inspired **FIGURES OF SPEECH** you can find in the Bible and in the church's liturgy that suggests so much richness. And as I have it, the early church seized on this very metaphor, on this particular Day, and literalized it. On this one Day of all the year, at the moment of Communion, the newly baptised were offered, along with bread and wine, a cup of milk laced with honey. Here were the Church's own "newborn babes." Neat, huh?

Now: How about recalling and **REPRISTINATING** that practice today, on this Day? We did this in my campus ministry days, in my campus ministry settings. Maybe the practice is too exotic to expect it to be widely embraced in more traditional parishes, in congregations less accustomed to the freaky, less open to the experimental. But who knows...?

In my campus ministry setting, we'd prepare a **SECOND CHALICE** or goblet, along with the bread and wine, and a pitcher of milk laced with honey, and place them on a credence or Offertory table before worship began. Then, at the distribution, along with the server offering bread and a second server offering wine, we'd enlist a third server to

offer the chalice of milk-and-honey, an acolyte standing by with the milk pitcher, to replenish as needed. We'd make it clear in an announcement — or in the sermon! — that you needn't receive the milk if you preferred not to. Common cup, of course. And of course its reception not limited to the newly baptised. I see no compelling reason why the milk should not be brought to the Altar too, along with the money, bread, and wine, at the Offertory, as part of the offering action.

We even went a step further. Because the Holy Communion almost certainly began, in apostolic times, within the context of an actual **MEAL**, a kind of *agape* feast (see *1 Corinthians*), and only later became ritually separated and understandably compressed as our current "hungry feast", we further elected to offer, on this Sunday only, still another possibility.

On this Day only of all the Sundays of the year — *Quasi Modo Geniti*, the Second Sunday of Easter — along with bread and wine and milk, we presented a selection of "**FINGER FOODS**": cubes of cheese in various varieties, dried figs, dates, apricots, olives, nuts, even veggies with dip, offered on a tray by still a fourth server. The tray also held a selection of paper napkins. We presented the tray with finger foods at the Altar at the Offering, along with money, bread, wine — and milk.

Again, the option of passing this by, rather than partaking, was presented as a legitimate personal choice. It was surprising to me, although perhaps it should not have been, how many elected to partake. With high enthusiasm. The Second Sunday of Easter became a **FAVOURITE** in our campus ministry calendar.

But perhaps you can't expect to do this kind of thing in your setting.

Pity.

