

Liturgy Questions and Answers on Zenit

The Exultet

The origin of the Exultet is intimately connected to that of the Easter candle. We dealt with this theme in our [column](#) of April 3, 2007.

In this column we wrote: "There is clear evidence that this solemn rite began no later than the second half of the fourth century. For example, the use of singing a hymn in praise of the candle and the Easter mystery is mentioned as an established custom in a letter of St. Jerome, written in 384 to Presidio, a deacon from Piacenza, Italy.

"Sts. Ambrose and Augustine are also known to have composed such Easter proclamations. The poetic and solemn text of the 'Exultet,' or Easter proclamation now in use, originated in the fifth century but its author is unknown."

Singing the Exultet is a proper function of a deacon although the priest may also do so. If this is not possible, another cantor may sing the Exultet.

Some vernacular versions of the Exultet also allow for the introduction of choral parts and responses. But this does not exclude the fact that the deacon or priest may also sing the proper parts.

In some places it appears that choirs and lay cantors have replaced the ordained ministers. This probably has more to do with the level of musical preparation of the clergy than with any designs of usurpation.

From personal experience I know how much time one has to invest so that this wonderful, and only apparently simple, melody truly ascends to God as an authentic prayer. It is understandable why some deacons and priests balk at the challenge rather than risk executing the Easter proclamation in every possible sense of the word.

Fr McNamara Zenit March 19, 2008