

REFLECTION

Sursum Corda

by Guillermo de Carndonagh

In a valley bound coal town the air hazy with the fumes and smoke of the smothering culm. The two teenage boys, hair slicked back attired in pegged pants and ill fitting sports jackets walked briskly down the brick paved hill of their neighborhood. At the main street they went across the bridge to the South and again down the hill to the West, to the large domed stone church. Along the way they encountered Stephan and his grandmother who like themselves were on their way to Mass. The two youths to Nativity, and Stephan and Grandma Shezmanski to Divine Liturgy at St. Josaphat's.

Later that day the three boys and their fellows from the trades high school would assemble for the pre-graduation apprentices and masters party; twenty blocks away at the home of their master tradesman on the West side of the city. Usually a happy time filled with the joys of youth finishing school an men good-naturedly hazing their charges; it would this year be a melancholy affair. The mill, the mill with its great hammers and smoking stacks, was being closed. Apprentice and master alike would soon be looking for work.

But first Mass at Nativity, originally a German parish but now a territorial parish, it was one of the most impressive churches in the city. The tall dark haired young man especially liked the strength of the congregational singing and chant in this parish. His own smaller church like all those in the city had a tradition of obedience to the teachings of Popes Pius X and XII with respect to congregational participation in the Mass's response, but Nativity was special. The sound would wash over you in waves and the hymn at the end of Mass seemed as if it could shake the eighteen inch thick stone walls. During the annual novena to the patron of the local monastery, the marching column of pilgrims from Nativity were noted for drowning out the voices of the columns they overtook. And so the two young men were strengthened by the graces of the ancient ritual with bells, candle, incense and the strong chant responses of their fellow workmen.

In the days that followed the three young men visited the dingy second floor recruiting center and signed the papers that would lead them into a new apprenticeship shortly after graduation. They joined the brotherhood of warriors, young boys faces hardly ready for a razor, sent to fight for a piece of jungle and swamp that even the hard bitten men of the French foreign could not hold. While they were away cowards and shirkers ascended to power in the public arena and the liturgy and faith that strengthened them on that weekend before their graduation became despoiled. The taller slightly older red head never came home lost somewhere in the endless swamps. Stephan returned twisted and addicted; and his thin dark friend looked about him and became angry and confused by the changes. Now older and resolute he is confident that some day, maybe far in the future, but some day, churches will again ring with the full voiced responses of their people in chant and song to the timeless, priceless, Mass of the West.

From the Encyclical "Mediator Dei" Pope Pius XII:

192. Besides, "so that the faithful take a more active part in divine worship, let Gregorian chant be restored to popular use in the parts proper to the people. Indeed it is very necessary that the faithful attend the sacred ceremonies not as if they were outsiders or mute onlookers, but let them fully appreciate the beauty of the liturgy and take part in the sacred ceremonies, alternating their voices with the priest and the choir, according to the prescribed norms.