

MARGARET RIZZA
MASS OF ST BENEDICT

IT WAS a joy to have an opportunity for informal sharing with Margaret on the evening that we began to look at her Mass of St Benedict. She had been an opera singer of some distinction (though she didn't mention this), but had never written music until, at the age of sixty, she was quite unexpectedly asked to write something for an occasion! She said her first thoughts were quite elaborate, but could never reach fruition. She then found that something quite simple was spontaneously rising into her consciousness and this pointed out the path she has always followed since she began composing liturgical music. We in turn reminded her that the Vatican II Constitution on the Liturgy had likewise expressed a desire for 'noble simplicity' in liturgical celebration.

She went on to explain some thoughts in the background of this particular Mass. The accompaniment for the Sanctus reflects both the steady swing of the censer and the rising incense smoke symbolising prayer experienced at Compostela. The Lamb of God expresses deep gratitude for the inestimable gift of God's redemptive love. These thoughts prepared us for the prayerful sensitivity of Margaret's music.

The Mass of St Benedict, whose Rule expresses that simplicity which is a key to Margaret's music can be celebrated in various ways, of which we tried several. There is a strong and simple melody line throughout, easily learnt by any congregation, and we sang parts of the Mass using this alone, without further embellishment. The organ accompaniment, though not essential, adds depth and beauty, as indeed do the vocal harmonies for those who have SATB available. Different communities will have different capacities for implementing what is on offer and again, different renderings might well be used for different degrees of solemnity. Maybe the single melody line in Advent, with or without a few simple chords; but when it comes to Christmas, one would want as full a use as possible of the various elements on offer.



It was a joy and a privilege to have Margaret with us, and for me, and no doubt for others, a truly memorable occasion.

*Sr Mary Pia OCD
Carmelite Monastery, Liverpool*

FROM AN INFORMAL GROUP DISCUSSION WITH MARGARET RIZZA

'The understanding of words can mould our voices. There is something very dynamic in Margaret's composing, described as a 'noble simplicity' by one of our group. 'I can never get simple enough, in the nothing, there is everything... Getting rid of the layers, like peeling an onion. Reading the scriptures is so exciting'. Margaret's music has a sense of the contemplative and spaciousness.

Margaret believes you can't get from A to B without going through A first. Patrick Russell asked, 'Does simplicity need to be a discipline'? 'Simplicity is a given, you can't make it. The fewer the notes, the better they need to be. It is the seeking of truth, the Pearl of Great Price. It is so hard to find it and takes a great deal of letting go. But the exiting thing is

getting the language, to get to the truth like revealing the sculpture in a block of wood, and touching the Spirit in the other person. The head has to come into the incarnate deep within us'. Margaret is at present working on the three Great 'O' antiphons.