

A Bard's Journey

BY: FR. KEITH BRANSON, C.P.P.S.



Music was the path that brought me into the Catholic Church and into the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Once I heard the Cry of the Blood through the writings of Saint Gaspar, I had to follow. Gaspar didn't say much about music in particular, once refusing a Mission House's request to buy a harpsichord. However, at the conclusion of his missions, the people would sing together an old Italian song: "Peace with God/Peace with everyone/Long live Peace."

Thirty years ago last summer, I was on retreat during Special Formation and read an article in the New Wine Press by Joe Nassal, in which he suggested the **Chalice Prayer** text (<https://youtu.be/9CqekszKt8Q?si=CBIMtQFCiMaFPjZA>) as a reflection. The melody came to me almost immediately: I wrote it down and worked on it right after I got back from the retreat, and I have revisited it several times over the years. It is a blessing to know that this refrain has been useful to Precious Blood Communities since then.

In the past three years, I've written three new congregational songs which I find helpful in reflection. **Mother of Sorrows** (https://youtu.be/bp-EsucybU0?si=JU_L-5rRPUR6LPuC) was written in 2023, in preparation for the beatification of Giovanni Merlini. It was inspired by the devotion Merlini shared with the Founder to the Sorrowful Mother. **Linger with Me** (<https://youtu.be/wLwgJEKW9zw?si=HRnRXl2oSdMbwCHN>) is a call to Adoration: it was a rare case (for me) where a melody suggested a text. The longing tune of the Skye Boat Song helped me imagine

Christ calling us into His presence. **Let My Will be Yours**

(https://youtu.be/aVJYru5IVMY?si=-lmzqvPu_MsQdvtL) was inspired by the discernment for the Provincial Election earlier this year, and I think it echoes Gaspar's desire to find where God wished him to be. It is a longing for all of us.

There are two longer works I would recommend for further consideration.

Requiem 2020 ([https://youtube.com/playlist?](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdH1lpJWldFZsREOUGO3iVuc1kHDHR1Wr&si=UEXuPWEaO6INQ9yp)

[list=PLdH1lpJWldFZsREOUGO3iVuc1kHDHR1Wr&si=UEXuPWEaO6INQ9yp](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdH1lpJWldFZsREOUGO3iVuc1kHDHR1Wr&si=UEXuPWEaO6INQ9yp))

was written in response to the COVID epidemic and dramatized the struggles during isolation many of us, particularly those of us who are older, went through at that time. It's not a liturgy: it's a song cycle sailing the waters between Hope and despair in search of God. **Faithwalkers** ([https://youtu.be/8zJVRGjDIW4?](https://youtu.be/8zJVRGjDIW4?si=FeTB8P9kO4Eg_Z9A)

[si=FeTB8P9kO4Eg_Z9A](https://youtu.be/8zJVRGjDIW4?si=FeTB8P9kO4Eg_Z9A)) is a liturgical Cantata based on Joe Nassal's book of the same name. This particular journey of the Stations of the Cross has always touched me and called me to go deeper into sharing in Christ's journey from Death to Life.

A composer's most popular work is often not what they consider their best or favorite. Although Handel presented The Messiah many times during his life, it was not his favorite among his oratorios. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor is an early work, and he probably would've considered a lot of his subsequent organ music (such as the Passacaglia) better. Maurice Ravel was amazed by the popular success of Bolero; for him it was an abstract exercise in orchestration. When a composer puts a new piece of music in front of someone else, the piece takes on a life of its own and travels its own journey. In some ways, it's similar to a preacher who has no control over where their message has guided people or what they find memorable. In both cases, a creative person listens in their heart for the prompting of the Holy Spirit, tries to let go and let God, and offers what they hear to everyone for the glory of God.





Questions for Reflection:

- How has music helped you encounter God or deepen your faith? Are there particular songs, hymns, or melodies that have shaped your spiritual journey?
- How might God be calling you to respond to the “Cry of the Blood” in your own life? What gifts or talents have you been invited to share in service of others and the mission of Christ?
- Fr. Keith reflects on the need to “let go and let God,” trusting that a creative work may touch others in unexpected ways. How might you be called to offer your gifts faithfully while allowing God to guide the outcome?