

SINGING TOGETHER

The hills appear to harmonize. On the side of one hillside is a group of villagers raking hay. They are singing. As if they were one choir, a group raking hay across the valley on the other hillside joins them in alternating verses. They give the impression of conversing in song. Everyone knows the lyrics by memory. But, they do not, necessarily, need to know each other. Slovakia has a repertoire of what are called “raking songs.”

My second cousin and her husband from Slovakia will be visiting me next month for the fourth time. Their visit reminds me of how much Slovaks like to sing, especially at Mass. Several years ago when I was celebrating one of my anniversaries of ordination to the priesthood, this particular cousin was in charge of making arrangements in one of the churches in Trencin. I was somewhat concerned when I found out that no music selections had been made. She had put some woman in charge and told me not to worry.

Throughout the Mass, this one individual simply started the hymn with the first few words, and the whole congregation joined in, raising the roof of the church with their singing. They all knew the hymns from memory and they sang in harmony with each other. The results were beautiful, and the experience was moving. That is, pretty much, the way it is in Slovakia, even to this day.

One of the “raking songs” that I like to listen to comes from Priechod. It speaks of “lending” voices to each other and how beautiful that is. “Even though you do not know me, you can hear me,” goes one of the lines. The response given from the opposite hillside is: “Because I hear you I know that you are from Priechod.”

The Allegheny Mountains of our Diocese remind every visiting Slovak of Slovakia. At my ordination as Bishop of this Diocesan Church 18 years ago, I made a reference to “The Sound of Music.” The line that I quoted was: “The hills are alive with the sound of music.” I guess that even this part of my heritage is in my blood.

The Sacred Scriptures encourage us to “sing a new song” in the Lord. But, as with any choir, it takes everyone to do his or her part, and to do it in cooperation with all of the others, in order to create a beautiful rendition of a composition. It is not any different in our life as a diocesan church, many as we are and standing on different slopes as we do. The composition that we are asked to present in harmony together is the Lord’s. Every one of us knows the lyrics.

We have been singing that song. There have been a few sour notes. But, generally, our song has echoed not only through the beautiful valleys of the eight counties where we live but has been heard elsewhere as well. The strains of that song of ours has lifted us up and drawn us together into a chorus. Verse by verse we continue to work together, as we give our rendition of the melody composed by the Lord. And, by that, they know who we are.