Dear friends:

As I read over what I wrote yesterday, I realise that I was very focused on music and thought I would like to expand that theme today.

Yesterday, I ended with the words of Psalm 118, one of the most joyful and expressive psalms, which is a part of our Easter celebration and one of the ones for which we can substitute “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!” as the refrain.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad! (Ps 118:24)

We need to be reminded sometimes that the Psalms are songs and meant to be sung. For that reason, if I cannot find a setting of the responsorial psalm for the Mass of the Day (which often happens with weekday Masses), I feel the need to write or adapt one. Think of one of your favourite popular songs and ask yourself if it would have the same appeal to you if the lyrics were simply read. The same goes for the Canticles such as the Magnificat. That is also why, if we cannot sing the Alleluia Gospel Acclamation, it is supposed to be omitted: Alleluia just doesn’t carry the same message when it is said. Think of the Alleluia from Handel’s Messiah (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NNy289k6Oc)

It also occurs to me that I can remember the words of a song far more easily than a prose passage I have had to memorise. I remember, as a teenager, singing along with the English comedy team, Flanders and Swann, to their First and Second Law (of Thermodynamics), and this may be the only Physics I remember fifty years later.

Science teachers, you can find this at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnbiVw_1FNs The same can be said of Tom Lehrer’s “The Elements” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcS3NOQnsQM) which reels off the periodic table. Scientific research tells us that singing results in improved blood circulation and an oxygenated blood stream to allow more oxygen to reach the brain, improving mental alertness, concentration, and memory. I’ve found that when driving alone at night, singing at the top of my lungs does help me to stay alert, and I’ve chanted the psalms and canticle of Morning Prayer during runs when I wasn’t sure I had the endurance. My mother
suffered from quite advanced dementia before she died and could become quite agitated; one of the most successful ways to calm her down and bring her back into contact with us was to start singing one of the old hymns she had learned as a child. This familiarity is very comforting – and also one of the reasons we keep using the well-known hymns in church, especially for funerals. Our Liturgy (from the Greek, leitourgia, meaning literally ‘work for the people’) and worship involves a lot of music because it has been long recognised that music does touch our senses and our emotions far more than words alone can. As a musician, I often feel that my music becomes my prayer and expresses what I want to say to God without my being able to verbalise.

GIA is offering some beautiful music and reflection which you may enjoy, along with some discussion of coping with stress, at: https://mailchi.mp/giamusic/interlude-volume-1-issue-12?e=2f0b7c879d

And you may enjoy this rousing piece performed by musicians from around the world: http://player.vimeo.com/video/55175112?v=0

If you have a block of time to sit back and reflect, you may enjoy this recording of St John’s Passion: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMF9XDQBAaI It is notable because all of the musicians, vocal and instrumental, are under 35. The version of the Passion in John’s Gospel is different from that of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) in that it focuses much more on Jesus’ divinity.

A shorter, gentle and joyful piece, performed a week ago by young people from around the world can be enjoyed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-hybuhxJg8

In re-sur-rec-ti-on-e tu-a Christ-e
Coe-li et ter-raLae-ten-tur
(In your resurrection Christ
Heaven and earth rejoice)

(Taizé – 2002)

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing? (attributed to Robert Lowry, 1869)

Until tomorrow,

Gillian

And as an afterthought from some of our CAF members, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNq-OU3vq8k&