

## THIRD CATECHESIS

# GOD’S GREAT DREAM

**“DID YOU NOT KNOW THAT I MUST BE ABOUT MY FATHER’S BUSINESS?” (Lk 2:49)**

### The Good News through Music The Beauty of Love

The piece to listen to: **Georg Friderich Handel, *Serse-Ombra mai fu***

**Keywords:** nuptial love, Adam and Eve, Great Mystery

#### Introduction

Talking about love with all its nuances is what AL invites us to do, reiterating the importance of combating emotional illiteracy, which is also fueled by a certain reticence to face the many aspects of love.

#### Listening Guide

Questions to facilitate the discussion of the piece

*Did you like the piece you listened to?*  
*Describe in three words the feelings that it aroused in you.*  
*Have you already heard music like this before?*  
*What instruments did you recognize?*  
*Can you sing the melody?*  
*With regard to the lyrics, what strong points appear in the song?*

This piece by Handel (1685-1759) speaks about a man and a woman united by the very mysterious bond that assumes the three faces of *eros* (desire: AL 120) *philia* (friendship: AL 123), and *agape* (charity: AL 90-120). The well-known aria is a part of Handel’s *Xerxes* (1737) and takes up an episode recounted by Herodotus, which refers to Xerxes’s symbolic falling in love with a beautiful plane tree. In Handel’s work, the tree is a metaphor for passionate love and the choice it implies. Xerxes indeed refreshes himself in the shade of a majestic plane tree and, soon afterward, through his song, he is enchanted by the beautiful Romilda. The conflict that animates the story begins here, where the sovereign will have to choose, in an intricate story, with whom he will unite himself.

#### The lyrics

*Frondi tenere e belle  
 del mio platano amato  
 per voi risplenda il fato.  
 Tuoni, lampi, e procelle  
 non v’oltraggino mai la cara pace,  
 né giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.*

*Ombra mai fu  
 di vegetabile,  
 cara ed amabile,  
 soave più.*

Handel's text lends itself to many symbolic readings that refer to the theme of human love, sung in all its hues, in the spirit of the Song of Songs, where precisely the natural symbolic imagery of animals (the dove, the fawn, the horse), plants (the apple tree), flowers (the narcissus), and perfumes (the myrrh) is used to sing love's beauty. We seize, in particular, the assonance between our theme and the closing of the *Song of songs*, when the protagonist affirms that she has found and knows how to bring peace to the other, the beloved, the cherished (Ct 8,10), just as Xerxes sings about the shadow of the plane tree. (AL 151-152; 284-285).

### **The Good News**

In *Ombra mai fu*, reference is made to the "language of the body," which, far from being a neutral field available for all interpretations, has its own symbolic way of communicating that has been lost. In an epoch when a social network is enough to decree friendship, the body is presented as a pliable reality and can be rewritten at will, as indicated by the challenge of gender spoken about in no. 56 of AL. In reality, the body is the bearer of a symbolic language capable of manifesting the different moments with which freedom connects people. For this reason, a handshake, a hug, a kiss, caresses and up to the full union of bodies, show a natural propedeuticity, which must be respected in order to enjoy the body in a true and authentic way. Otherwise, one risks lying with the body, in deed and thought, instead of celebrating the truth of the encounter with the other person. To the questions full of educational apprehension asked by the Pope: "Who speaks about these things today? Who is able to take young people seriously? Who helps them to prepare themselves seriously for a great and generous love?" we believe that we can answer, if not exhaustively certainly significantly, by taking up and enhancing the ancient tradition of listening to sacred music, which continually presents the strength of symbolic language, in the works and themes it deals with. Here, an eminent the training ground necessary, as no. 285 points out, for helping young people to recognize and value the difference of the partner, in the joyous acceptance of oneself. In fact, music is constitutively the harmonization of differences, assembled in these relationships. The alternation of music and silence, of highs and lows, of solos and choral sections, and of all the other forms with which it manifests itself, constitutes an implicit but profound education to assimilate the taste for the harmony of diversity.