

## SECOND CATECHESIS

### FAMILIES IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WORD

*"HIS PARENTS WENT TO JERUSALEM  
EVERY YEAR AT THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER" (Lk 2:41)*

**The Good News through Music**  
**The Easter memory and proclamation of every liberation**  
 The piece to listen to: **Giuseppe Verdi** *Va 'Pensiero*

**Keywords:** Easter celebration, exodus, crisis

#### Introduction

The Christian Easter resumes and embodies the Hebrew Passover told about in the Book of Exodus. The passage through the sea becomes the model for every form of non-violent liberation and the possibility of finding innovative solutions in every situation marked by personal or community crises.

#### 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?*

According to Maria Chiara Mazzi, *Nabucco* by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) "is linked to the biblical vein that was also that of Rossini's *Moses*. Verdi started to work from the final scene (Abigaille's death), whereas the collective spirit and the dramatic force of the chorus, symbol of a people in chains (the reason for which the work achieved its success), were progressive conquests. The drama does not develop so much a story but rather four photographic moments, without following the individuals' psychological evolution. The choir is the protagonist of *Nabucco*, while the characters are outlined through the fusion of old and new style: Ismaele and Fenena (the lovers) and Abigaille (the antagonist) are treated in a traditional way, by means of vocality and character, whereas the monotypical figures of Nabucco and Zaccaria (the leaders) are new, impressive in their solitude and prototypes of those tragic creatures typical of Verdi's future works. Verdi does not forget the theatrical conventions here but bends them to his own needs by modifying the weight of each element and eliminating what is not strictly necessary or functional for the performance of the drama. This happens especially in the finales, innervated by new force and increased monumentality" (M.C. Mazzi, *Il racconto della musica*, Bologna 2010, 165)

After a brief orchestral introduction, the alternation of the strings and the embroidery in pianissimo of flute and clarinet seem to evoke the distant countries to be spoken of, the lyrics begin

*Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate;  
Va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli,  
Ove olezzano libere e molli  
L'aure dolci del suolo natal!*

*Va pensiero, sulle tue ali d'oro;  
va e posati sui pendii e sulle colline  
dove profuma, tiepida e deliziosa,  
l'aria della nostra terra natale!*

<i>Del Giordano le rive saluta, Di Sionne le torri atterrate... Oh mia patria sì bella e perduta! Oh membrananza sì cara e fatal!</i>	<i>Saluta le rive del Giordano, saluta le torri rase al suolo di Sion! Oh mia patria, così bella ma perduta! Oh ricordo così caro, ma così doloroso!</i>
<i>Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati, Perché muta dal salice pendi? Le memorie nel petto raccendi, Ci favella del tempo che fu!</i>	<i>Arpa d'oro dei grandi profeti, perché pendi dal salice, silenziosa? Riaccendi nel nostro cuore i ricordi, parlaci ancora della nostra storia!</i>
<i>O simile di Solima ai fati Traggi un suono di crudo lamento, O t'ispiri il Signore un concento Che ne infonda al patire virtù! (×4 volte)</i>	<i>O simile al destino di Gerusalemme, fai risuonare un canto di crudele lamento, oppure il Signore ti ispiri una musica che sappia infondere forza nella sofferenza!</i>

The text presents some lexical difficulties because of the use of aulic and terms now obsolete but typical of nineteenth-century poetry. In particular, we notice “clivi” for “hills,” “olezzano” for “perfume,” “membrananza” for “memory” “favela” for “talking,” “fatidici vati” for “prophecies,” “concent” for “harmonious sound,” as well as proper names, where Sionne indicates the fortress of Jerusalem, located on Mount Zion, and Solima derives from the ancient denomination of the holy city (*Ierusalaim*).

### The Good News

“Along the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept, remembering Zion. We hung our harps on the willows of that land” (Psalm 137:1–2). These biblical verses inspire the famous choir in the third act of Verdi’s *Nabucco* when the Jews exiled in Babylon express in song the nostalgia for their lost homeland. More precisely, the psalmist invites us not to forget it: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you” (vv.5-6). The temptation is, in fact, to resign oneself to the present situation, conforming to the winner’s culture and abandoning one’s homeland forever, which for the Jew is a gift from God; hence, abandoning the one means risking also to abandon the other. Keeping the memory of the land alive is, therefore, a source of hope in a new liberating intervention of God and becomes an act of faith. This is why memory is so important both in Judaism and Christianity: the harp of the biblical prophets, once again inspired by the Lord who does not abandon his people, must be able to give them strength to bear the painful situation in which they find themselves, infusing virtue to suffer, while waiting for the imminent redemption.

The exodus from Egypt thus becomes the hope of liberation and a way out of all those situations that seem without a solution.