

FOURTH CATECHESIS

THE GREAT DREAM FOR EVERYONE

*“AND ALL WHO HEARD HIM
WERE AMAZED AT HIS UNDERSTANDING AND HIS ANSWERS” (Lk 2,47)*

The Good News through Music The Importance of Discernment

The piece to listen to: **Jules Massenet, *Thaïs*—meditation for violin and orchestra**

Keywords: forgiveness, conversion, change

Introduction

Even the most desperate situations can change. This is the trust that faith invites us to have towards each person. The motor of change is the discernment indispensable for finding one's own way, as to the protagonist of Massenet's piece does.

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?
What struck you most about this song and why?

The stunning piece of meditation for violin and orchestra, taken from *Thaïs* (1894) by Jules Massenet (1842-1912), is a musical illustration of the possibility and power of discernment and conversion. The beautiful *Thaïs*, the protagonist of Anatole France's novel that bears the same title and was worked into a libretto, after having met the monk *Athanael*, is deciding to change her life from courtesan to bride of the Lord. The music represents the travail and the tumult within her heart, between the bonds that keep her tied to the past, to the fears of abandoning it, but also the mild but resolute fascination of the new life which she feels more suited to her humanity. A night of labor and new birth like that of Jacob at the ford of the Jabbok (Gen 32:23–33), or the of Jesus himself in the Garden of Olives (Lk 22:39–46). These nights are the paradigm of the itinerary of all past and future converts, an indication of the hope that for all it is possible, but not without a guide, to recognize the presence of the Spirit working in their lives. To the people on the way, therefore ultimately to everyone, we cannot apply only universal rules, although they are good in themselves, rather we must accompany each person in the progressive and sometimes painful experience of conversion. This is done through discernment, as AL 304 effectively recalls.

The Good News

One of the last numbers quoted in the apostolic letter strongly emphasizes that Christian marriage and, therefore, “the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment” (AL 72). Discernment, spoken of in many passages of the letter (especially in Chapter VIII), is a kind of leitmotif alongside that of mercy. Discernment refers to the work of the Spirit, to His presence, and to the recognition of the signs and the language with which He speaks to the heart of every person. It is a dynamic that involves the mind and the heart, thoughts, and affections. Rooted in biblical experience, developed in the history of ecclesial spirituality, it is a practice that has been lost in the last centuries. This is the cause of the weariness and disorientation

created in many people who instead prefer the solid certainties that derive from the notarial application of the law. Behind the resistance of its application, there is fundamentally the doubt that God can really speak to every person's heart, illuminating and guiding his/her choices to what is good.