

SIXTH CATECHESIS

THE CULTURE OF HOPE

“HIS MOTHER KEPT ALL THESE THINGS IN HER HEART” (Lk 2:51)

The Good News through Music The Foundation of Hope

The piece to listen to: **Georg Friedrich Handel, *Messiah-Hallelujah***

Keywords: ultimate destiny, revelation, hope

Introduction

In a world that changes very quickly and seems to want to abandon all the certainties it had, the strongest temptation is to lose hope in the future and in the fact that things can change. Our hope is not an illusion because it is based on the victory that Jesus has already won over the forces of evil and resignation.

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?

The *Hallelujah* of Handel (1685-1759) is a part of the Oratorio *The Messiah* (1742), one of this Baroque musician's most famous compositions. It was composed in just 24 days for a charitable work, with a libretto by Charles Jennens. Performed for the first time in Dublin in 1742, the oratory describes the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, making constant reference to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. In fact, the oratory is a type of sacred art, not intended for liturgy. The first part deals with Advent and Christmas; the second of the Passion and of the Resurrection, culminating in the famous *Hallelujah*; the third concerns the glorification of God and man's destiny.

Chorus Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

The Kingdom of this world is become the

Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

The text of the *Hallelujah* is a collection of quotations from the Revelation of St. John. Let us consider their meaning.

The first quotation: “Hallelujah. He took possession of his kingdom the Lord, our God, the Almighty” (Rev 19:6), expresses the invitation to praise and the exultation that Christians raise to God for the victory over the “Great prostitute,” over Babylon, which is spoken about in chapters 17 and 18. Both are symbols of the powers of evil that have tried in every possible way to impede the establishment of God's kingdom through Jesus. In fact, Revelation recounts, in symbolic terms, the great struggle that took place between Jesus and the satanic powers. Two mentalities clashed: On the one hand, the logic of submission to political power and the military or economic power,

personified by Babylon, with clear reference to Rome, the hegemonic power of the time. On the other hand, Jesus and the Father, who intend to break this mentality, by proving, at the cost of personal sacrifice, that it is possible to love unconditionally, thus putting humanity back on the trail that the Creator had intended for it. The decisive moment was the sacrifice of the cross, where Jesus, as sacrificial lamb, showed to all what a loving heart can do. This is why the people of his disciples now celebrates and invites to praise, as Handel's Hallelujah majestically does. This is a people that celebrates the feast of its liberation together with the choir of angels in heaven, who rejoice over the result achieved by the sacrifice of the Father's beloved Son.

The second quotation: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15), is the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom by the angel that concludes the sounding of the seven trumpets. The seventh trumpet, like the seventh seal, repeats the theme of the fulfillment of the good news foretold by the prophets (Rev 10:7). The event is not described directly, but rather in its effects: the prostration of the heavenly court and the opening of the temple, with the appearance of the Ark of the Covenant. What now happens in heaven is also what occurred on earth at the moment of Jesus' death (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45).

Finally, the third quotation: "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16; also see Rev 17:4, where the term refers to the lamb that symbolizes Christ), is an explicit reference to the knight who appears in chapter 19, i.e. Jesus himself, the true and faithful witness who fought and won the decisive battle against all his enemies.

The Good News

The lyrics and the music invite us to have faith and hope in the fact that, despite appearances, the hardest battle is behind us and has already been won for us by our Redeemer, the beloved Jesus. This is crucial because in, the face of the many difficulties surrounding the family and human love today, lucidly exposed in chapter two of AL, the temptation of discouragement and resignation may appear.

The challenge requires efforts; but, in the sign of the Risen One, everything becomes possible again, even if the storm seems to grow more violent. It is not by chance that H. U. von Balthasar, a theologian who long meditated on the value of the Book of Revelation for our times, has brought to light a kind of theodramatic law that the last book of Scripture presents to us: to the radical "yes" of God to man in Christ is opposed to the enemy's determined "no." This is comparable to when the doctor arrives; the diseases are recognized for what they are, and they manifest themselves with all their virulence. Paradoxically, Revelation invites us to see the world's realities differently from the way we usually evaluate them. The appearance of evil, in a sort of crescendo, is a symptom of its definitive defeat. It is the wild, ferocious beast that is agitated because it feels that its end is imminent and ineluctable. Those who, following the example of Revelation, have accepted this gaze based on recognizing the power of Jesus' loving death no longer fear anything: they are martyrs who have not renounced in the face of any persecution, from that of Diocletian to those of our times. Many young people who today, in different parts of the world, have the courage to die unhesitatingly in order not to deny their faith are tangible proof that evil does not win, that love is as strong as death and indeed even stronger. The same can be said of the many young persons who, despite the prevailing cultural climate, decide to get married in the Lord, promising indissoluble fidelity and mutual respect.