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Audience with participants in the Third International Congress on “Church, Music, Interpreters: a necessary dialogue”, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Third International Congress on *Church, Music, Interpreters: a necessary dialogue*, at the conclusion of its work. The Congress, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute of Religious Music and the Liturgical Institute of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant’Anselmo, took place in the Vatican from 7 to 9 November 2019.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I offer you a cordial welcome as you gather for this Third International Congress devoted to the theme: *Church, Music, Interpreters: A Necessary Dialogue*. I am grateful to the Pontifical Council for Culture, which, in cooperation with the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music and the Liturgical Institute of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant’Anselmo, has made this meeting possible. I greet all taking part, and in a particular way, I thank Cardinal Ravasi for his kind words of introduction. I hope that the work accomplished in these days may prove to be for everyone a stimulating experience of the Gospel, of liturgical life, and of service to the Church and culture.

We often think of an interpreter as a kind of translator, a person whose task is to convey something he or she has received in such a way that another person can understand it. Yet an interpreter, especially in the field of music, necessarily “translates” in a unique and personal way – in a unique and personal way – what the composer has written, in order to create a beautiful and outstanding artistic experience. In effect, a musical work exists only insofar as it is interpreted, and thus only when someone is there to interpret it.

A good interpreter feels great humility before a work of art that is not his or her property. Recognizing that they

put their expertise at the service of the community, such interpreters constantly strive to be formed and transformed, interiorly and professionally, in order to bring out the beauty of the music and, in the context of the liturgy, to serve others through the works they perform (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 115). Every interpreter is called to develop a distinctive sensibility and genius in the service of art which refreshes the human spirit, and in service to the community. This is especially the case if the interpreter carries out a liturgical ministry.

The interpreter of music has much in common with the biblical scholar, with the proclaimer of God's word, but also with those who seek to interpret the signs of the times, and, even more generally, with all those – and each of us should be one of them! – who are open and attentive to others in sincere dialogue. Every Christian, in fact, is an interpreter of the will of God in his or her own life, and by his or her life sings a joyful hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. Through that song, the Church interprets the Gospel as she makes her pilgrim way through history. The Blessed Virgin Mary did this in an exemplary way in her *Magnificat*, while the saints interpret the will of God by their lives and mission.

Saint Paul VI, in the course of an historic meeting with artists in 1964, offered this reflection: “Our ministry, as you know, consists in preaching and rendering accessible, comprehensible, and indeed moving, the things of the spirit, the invisible, the ineffable, the things of God himself. And in this activity, that transfers the invisible world into accessible, intelligible formulas, you are masters. It is your task, your mission; and your art consists in grasping treasures from the heavenly realm of the spirit and clothing them in words, colours, forms, thus making them accessible” (*Insegnamenti* II [1964], 313). In this sense, then, the interpreter, like the artist, expresses the ineffable by using words and materials that transcend concepts, in order to convey the kind of “sacramentality” typical of aesthetic representation.

There is a dialogue, because experiencing a work of art is never something static or mathematical. There is a conversation between the author, the work and the interpreter. It is a three-way conversation. And this conversation is original for each of its interpreters: one interpreter understands it this way, and renders it this way; another in a different way. But what is important is the dialogue, that also allows for development in the performance of a work of art. I am thinking, for example, of a work of Bach performed by Richter or by Gardiner: they are different things. The dialogue is something else, and the interpreter must enter into the conversation between author, work and himself. We should never forget this.

The artist, the interpreter and – in the case of music – the listener, all have the same desire: to understand what beauty, music and art allow us to know of God's grandeur. Now perhaps more than ever, men and women have need of this. Interpreting that reality is essential for today's world.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you again for your commitment to the study of music, and liturgical music in particular. My wish is that, day by day, you may become – each in his or her own way – ever better interpreters of the Gospel, of the beauty that the Father has revealed to us in Christ Jesus, and of the praise that expresses our filial relationship to God. I give you my heartfelt blessing, and I ask you please not to forget to pray for me.
